

Sarah Beck: You're listening to *Garden Futurist*. I'm Sarah Beck.

The episode you are about to hear is a little different from our usual format. My conversation with Michael Boland, Chief Park Officer at Presidio Trust in San Francisco, is an attempt to fill you in on a really exciting in-person event Pacific Horticulture held back in August, when we walked the newly opened Tunnel Tops landscape.

Let's get right to hearing my interview, but I want to say that this conversation goes into some truly profound ideas and they feel very broadly relevant. Are you ready to embrace the Anthropocene?

I hope you'll find this conversation as inspiring as I did.

Sarah Beck: Michael Boland, welcome to *Garden Futurist*.

Michael Boland: Hello, nice to be here today.

Sarah Beck: Just last week, we took a long walk together and it was just me and you and about 70 of our closest friends. It was a really special Pacific Horticulture event. We got to be at The Presidio San Francisco with a really all-star cast of people who contributed to the new Tunnel Tops Garden.

This is really an iconic space. I kept stepping back and looking around me that day and thinking, "I really am standing here looking at the Golden Gate Bridge and I'm looking at Alcatraz Island and oh, look, there's this beautiful forest behind me. And, oh, there's a bunch of seabirds and marsh birds, and look are those people windsurfing?" I commented to your staff and they're, there all the time and they still feel it, that sense of like, this is such a unique environment and, and space to be.

Let's go ahead and just talk about this incredible project. There is a lot that is important here and specifically to everyone in the Pacific region, because this is more than a massive, what, decade-long multidisciplinary project that has changed the face of one of the most iconic landscapes in North America. It really is more than that. Can you give us some orientation to just what The Presidio encompasses?

Michael Boland: Yeah. I'm happy to. So, when I was little, growing up in the Bay Area, The Presidio was that green bit at the southern end of the Golden Gate Bridge. Like we drive into San Francisco across the Golden Gate

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Bridge, or we drive to the bridge. You know, there's that you're in town and it feels like the rest of San Francisco and then suddenly you're in the forest, it was like the most magical thing.

I remember I was a boy scout and I camped at Rob Hill Campground, and I remember it was magical to wake up in the morning and I could hear the fog horns and I could hear seals barking. I was in the middle of San Francisco and it's just like, this is weird. It's weird, but it's amazing. I think I fell in love with it then, when I was a boy scout, when I was a young man.

So, The Presidio, what it is literally is a national park site. It's 1,492 acres. One of the many, interesting, and special numbers we'll talk about today. 1,492 acres that is the very center of what I think of as the most amazing urban national park in the United States, if not the world, the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), which is 80 miles long, it's 114 square miles. So it's a lot of park. It was created in 1972 because the National Park Service was, as it's always been, a really forward-thinking organization. They realized that national parks weren't serving everyone in our communities, that national parks were only serving the few, they were serving a disproportionately white, disproportionately wealthy, disproportionately, well-educated subset of the American public. And so they wanted to bring national parks to cities. So they created GGNRA then, and when they did that, they drew a line around The Presidio, this 1,492 acre space, and in 1989, when the Army decided they no longer needed The Presidio as a military site, it automatically transferred into the national park, which was really great because otherwise, like almost every other military site in America, it would've been developed and become part of the rest of the city.

Sarah Beck: Yeah, those numbers really are astounding. It is a huge amount of landscape. There are just so many different things going on plant wise. And you know, it's really interesting thinking about the fact that this is a space that had these formal early landscapes and gardens. And I know you had mentioned something about, "Oh, if somebody was stationed there, they might have had a spouse who was living there too, who might have wanted to participate in shaping what that landscape looked like or the gardens."

So you have that, you have natural lands, you've done enormous ecological restoration efforts, and then you also have these climate adapted plants

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from around the world, and you also have now this new project, a lot of endemic, native plants that have been designed in. There seems to be some really interesting integration of all of those.

Michael Boland: It's an incredibly rich site. I mean, it was, like all of the center of the Bay. It was inhabited for thousands of years by the Ohlone people, the Ohlone that were here in The Presidio where the Ramaytush Ohlone, and they were here until 1776, another one of those numbers, 1776, which is when the Spanish arrived and they founded The Presidio, they founded a garrison, which is a presidio. That really began about 230 years of military use of the site. Was really an outpost, on the edge of the Pacific separated from any large city by thousands and thousands and thousands of miles, it really was an outpost.

And so, starting in the 1880s, well, actually even before that, even during the Spanish period, the European colonists started to modify the landscape. It was never a landscape that was wooded, there were small forests that were located in the riparian corridors. It would've been primarily coastal scrub and coastal prairie, but they brought cattle and the cattle started to graze and they modified the landscape, and they freed the sand, if you will, by eating down all of the plants that protected, held the dunes in place.

So frankly, as a result overgrazing—

Sarah Beck: You lost some land, huh?

Michael Boland: Yeah, The Presidio, a good portion of it ended up in downtown San Francisco, I think probably over time. and we know this because we've done a paleolimnology study of Mountain Lake and we dug down to the original bottom of the lake, which is about 2000 years old, and we could see the exact moment the cattle arrived, and we saw this huge spike in the sedimentation rates. And we knew that's when they arrived because there were European grass seeds in their guts.

Sarah Beck: Oh wow.

Michael Boland: And European grass appears in the pollen record. So we know that in the late 18th century, the Spanish arrived, grazing began. The landscape was modified, and this really began 230 years of modification of the landscape by the Spanish, then the Mexican government, then the American military.

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It was an open base. So that meant the public could come and go. They could drive through the base. And so the commanding officers during the American period were always really concerned about its appearance. They also were being strategic because they wanted the public to love it because there was a lot of pressure, especially after Golden Gate Park was built, for the Army to give the land to the city, to build a park, ironically. The only way they could fight back was to essentially make The Presidio a park.

So, they planted the forest, they built this great set of curving streets. People came and used it, but it was a military base.

We have pictures as far back as the Civil War of really elaborate gardens that were built with these elaborate frames to block blowing sand and protect the plants, because it was such a miserable place. If you read these descriptions of the diaries of the soldiers that were here in the 1860s and '70s, they're all complaining about the wind.

In fact, the houses on Funston Street used to face west, they didn't literally pick the houses up, but what they did is they sort of reworked the houses, so they faced east.

Sarah Beck: Changed the orientation. Oh, interesting.

Michael Boland: Part of that was because the soldiers' wives that lived there endlessly complained about the sand blowing in the front doors of the houses that were located along the parade, because it was such a miserable place.

So the garden was in part about making a beautiful place. It was in part about the people who lived here. But it also was just part of how you stabilize the world in that way. And you know, the forest is an outgrowth of that. This tradition of gardening is an outgrowth of that. It was the way they sort of claimed and tamed, is the way I think about it, The Presidio for the military, bringing this sort of Western mindset to the land.

Sarah Beck: That's so interesting. I think when we compare that to the efforts, building the Tunnel Tops in a way it's also a reaction to humans being in a space. And in this case, we're talking about a freeway, right? Freeways aren't super friendly to sit right next to either. And yet there's this component of finding a way for humans to be in that space and cope in that space, right?

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Michael Boland: Yeah, no, it's true. In the 1930s, when the Golden Gate Bridge was built. Because it was an Army base. The Army didn't want the public to touch the ground. They wanted them out of their way, right? Because it was still a military base. We just finished the first world war. There were warning signs, the rise of fascism in Europe. So, when they built the approach to the bridge, the Army required them to build an elevated freeway.

Freeways have a kind of halo, right? There's the freeway itself, but then usually along the freeway, there's a kind of halo of junk. I mean, really, I don't know how else to describe it. They have a big shadow, right? There's noise and pollution and all that. And so the Doyle Drive, when it was built, it had a kind of halo of motor pools and gas stations and pavement and parking lots. This wall of junk, we'll call it, really cleaved The Presidio into halves. I mean, it was like gazillion dollar real estate with this billion-dollar view that was full of trucks.

Sarah Beck: Well, this is not uncommon, right? I mean just looking at development in the world. These areas where a lot of things happen, it's easy for development to move in one direction like that. But here we've got what seems like a really different vision now.

I know this has been a long running, probably very complex conversation, but just in terms of that main decision, can you just describe how this was transformed and just like what it took to get that freeway underground?

Michael Boland: Tame the freeway.

Sarah Beck: Tamed

Michael Boland: In 1989, the Loma Prieta earthquake happened, and the freeway collapsed in the East Bay and suddenly a big conversation started about the elevated freeways around the Bay, most of which didn't meet contemporary seismic standards, and Doyle Drive was no exception.

It was the earliest of them all and it was a mess. It had always had a reputation for being one of the unsafest roadways in America, actually. That began a conversation about rebuilding it and the first kind of opening salvo in that conversation. CalTrans (The California Department of Transportation) proposed the same thing twice as wide because to meet current freeway standards, it would've had to be twice as wide.

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So, this giant elevated freeway, and we were in the middle of doing a plan for the future of The Presidio as a national park. And you know, the public wisely rose up and said, "No way, this is this precious national historic landmark site, it's a biodiversity hotspot, it's full of all these really rare endangered and threatened plants. You're not going to build like a two X freeway through the middle of it."

So luckily, a local landscape architect named Michael Painter had this idea, and it was a beautiful idea and also a very practical idea. The idea was to build a parkway rather than the freeway, and to, at key points raise the freeway to allow the park to go under it or lower the freeway to build tunnels over the top of it.

And there's sort of two of each, there are two sets of each. For example, at the eastern end, he raised the freeway so that we could extend the Chrissy field marsh under it and connect up to the Tennessee Hollow Watershed, which is this 300-acre watershed that we've been restoring over the last two decades, because the Army had buried all the streams and we've been gradually daylighting them and restoring them. So that's an example of the under.

The over, there are two sets of cut-and-cover tunnels. One connects over to these historic gun batteries, but the really important ones for this story are the ones in the main post. And why they're important is they're at the very center of the park and they're at the most public spot in the park that connects Chrissy Field and the main post, which are the two most public parts of the park.

The good news was, the scheme that he developed was cheaper and faster, as well as better.

Sarah Beck: Oh, wow, that's nice.

Michael Boland: So the community really galvanized around it. CalTrans galvanized around it. We all got started building this freeway, but what's also true is CalTrans job was building a freeway, not building a park.

And so we realized that the site was such a huge opportunity, that we couldn't just make it 14 acres of grass, which is pretty much what was what CalTrans had proposed to do, because that was sort of in their wheelhouse, appropriately in their wheelhouse.



We wanted more because we had for decades heard from the public about all these things they needed to really enjoy The Presidio, all the kind of missing goodies, basic stuff like picnic tables and bathrooms and good food and beautiful views and a place for their kids to play. What this became was this incredible opportunity for us to bring all that feedback we had over the years together, all the aspirations that the community had and all the input they'd given us about how to make The Presidio welcoming to everybody, bring that together in one spot. To create a new, I think of it as the green heart for the park. That place everyone can begin and end. It's that, it's like our little Yosemite Valley.

You can go out and enjoy the park from there. So that's the genesis, that's that brings us up to the point where we have the land basically to build on.

Sarah Beck: Then you had a bunch of decisions to make about plants. You already mentioned the intensity of the wind, the salt, the sea air. You've got a lot of interesting coastal extremes, that certainly could be a number of choices. Like you said, that could have just been some turf, instead you've looked at a lot of climate adapted plants from around the world that have been selected and then you also have these endemic plants.

Can you just talk a little bit about how this conversation about the plants fit into the context of the place, the ecology, the habitat areas, as well as just what you're trying to achieve? You've got this public space too.

Michael Boland: Yeah. The Presidio is one of the most complex national park sites, because it's all a national historically landmark district. It's also a biodiversity hotspot, with nearly 400 native plant species. Of those, 21 of them are rare, endangered, or threatened, and once I realized that it kind of blew my mind, we have the highest density of special status plant species of any national park site, because it's so small, you know? So, there are these tiny fragments of natural area that were never developed by the Army that has this incredible richness incredible biodiversity.

So, biodiversity hotspot, national historic landmark district, all like cattywampus, like layered all over each other. And a park that is, that was created to welcome everybody, and especially traditionally underrepresented communities and the only national park site in America that has to be financially self-sufficient. So, we have to generate enough money each year to cover the cost of operating The Presidio.



So every decision we make is about those four things. It's about history, community, environment, and finance, right? Because we've got to make decisions. The wonderful thing is the way these things work together, synergistically, and to me, the Tunnel Tops is a perfect example of that.

We are a biodiversity hotspot and because these relic natural areas were so small, it was only about 7 percent of the park that was relic natural area when we started.

The area's too small to really create sustainable populations of the species. Six of the endangered species exist nowhere else on earth. Like the Raven's manzanita (*Arctostaphylos hookerii* ssp. *ravenii*), there's one in the wild. So, we had to really dramatically expand the footprint of the natural area in the past, but the whole thing is a landmark.

So having to figure out ways to expand the populations of these species and to expand the footprint of these new relic natural areas, while at the same time preserving the historic character has meant that **we've had to adopt a mindset that I think is a 21st century mindset.** It's not a 19th century mindset or even 18th century mindset, this notion of nature and culture sitting in opposition to each other. I mean, it goes all the way back to Greek times, but you know this notion of the kind of utilitarian and primeval landscapes. We had to go way beyond that.

We also had to go way beyond, I think of the great third model, which is the picturesque, which is really what has informed most of the great 19th century and 20th century gardens and landscapes. **You know, this notion that a landscape can emulate nature without actually having the ecological values of nature.**

Ironically, what we needed to do was do the opposite. We need to manage The Presidio as a human landscape, as a humanized landscape. One that is full of human values of historical values but manage it for biodiversity and manage it for ecological value. So, it's an inversion of the picturesque, actually.

And to do that, we've had to really open our minds and stretch our minds about how to manage things like a 300-acre historic forest, that has all of this historic character, that has all these historic values, that is, in fact, the



largest single contributing feature in The Presidio's national historic landmark district.

And it's dying, because the trees they planted only live 130 years, so it's dying. **Thinking through how you do that in a way that strikes the balance. And so we've adopted a philosophy of human-centered restoration, where we anchor the restoration work.**

It's still science-based, like any other restoration, but we anchor it in a deep understanding of people and their aspirations about a place, their values for a place, the ways they use a place, and also take really seriously the job of educating them about the environmental impact of their presence and educating them about the ways they can actually have a positive impact, particularly around biodiversity in the world.

So we've had to really turn that on its head and create this human-centered restoration program, engaging thousands of volunteers, every restoration project we do; they're trails that cut through it, they connect the places people want to go. But ironically, that allows us to restore the rest, because people are going where they want to go. The insight that I had about this was actually at Versailles, one day.

Sarah Beck: Of all places.

Michael Boland: It's a very odd analog, but I was hiking through Versailles, and I watched that everybody knew where to walk. It's a very structured place, right. But what's true is that there are all of these areas at Versailles that are closed. And then, I found a hole in the fence and I snuck into an area, I'm sure I wasn't supposed to be inside one of the Palisades, right? And I went into it and it was this 300-year-old forest. Full of birds, incredibly rich understory. But when you walked around the edges of it, there were formal hedges, and it was trimmed and I realized that the thing that Versailles did so beautifully is it took people where they wanted to go and created places—these eddies—where nature could thrive, and that we needed to think of The Presidio in the same way. We needed to create this network of experiences that brought people where they needed to go and wanted to go but left all of these eddies where nature could thrive.

And so that's the approach we've taken, throughout the whole Presidio. **I think it's frankly, the way we need to think about the world in the 21st**

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century. We need to create these eddies in our cities where nature can thrive and where it connects the breadcrumbs and create connectivity and address some of the structural challenges that wildlife and plants face in the 21st century by reimagining the relationship of nature and culture.

I like to think of it as sort of synthetic nature as what we're really after. Everybody has their novel ecosystems. There are all kinds of words for it. But here at The Presidio, we've had to do it because of the strange nature of the place, because of the weird and complicated multidimensional mandate we have, and also because it's a great laboratory for us to experiment around this kind of work.

Sarah Beck: I love when we get into this is the city of the future kind of conversation. It is so ironic that you're saying when you, when you turn everything so that it's human centered. So interestingly, you're making space for the ecology, you're making space for habitat.

I want to jump through a couple of areas that I saw when we were visiting. And I think you can speak to this concept on each of these ideas. I want to start with turf because we're always talking "Life not Lawn," and we want ecosystem services from our gardens and plants.

And yet anybody who has ever had a toddler knows that there is no better place to put a little kid than on a perfect soft piece of turf. I mean a little bit of lawn really goes a long way for a variety of things. If you're kicking a soccer ball, if you're wanting to lounge with a picnic, there is this human love, certainly in America, we know have this history of loving turf.

And yet when I saw the percentage of space that was actually covered by the new Tunnel Tops Park in turf, it was actually pretty modest and small. When you looked at that, that patch of ground where people were sitting, they were completely surrounded by these beautiful, totally right plant right place, planting beds of tons of plants, even surrounding the children's area.

It was almost like everybody was totally happy to sit on their little patch of turf, surrounded by what I think could be a totally new aesthetic. Like this idea of, "Oh, look, here are all these climate-appropriate plants surrounding me." That's what I'm used to seeing when I'm sitting on my little bit of lawn.

Michael Boland: We approached lawn as a piece of visitor infrastructure. The Army loved lawn. We have so much lawn. They used it as a ground

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cover. They actually used lawn as a landscaping element. That was about occupying space because they had lots of manpower, especially between wars and they did a lot of very labor-intensive things.

So they planted lawn everywhere. And what we've done since we took over The Presidio is gradually reduced the amount of lawn. And part of that has been a mindset shift, to stop thinking of lawn as a ground cover and think of lawn as a facility. And so we're scaling lawn to the activities that we expect will happen and everywhere else, if there's a patch of lawn that is useless, we get rid of it.

And we replant the area with climate adapted, either native or non-native species, because the environmental impacts of lawn are so huge. I mean the beds that were lawn, that we've replaced with climate-adapted plantings, use a tenth as much water. At some point in their lives, they become almost fully self-sufficient, water wise.

They also coincidentally require about a tenth as much labor once they're established. And again, there's a point where they require almost none, and they provide all of these ecological values to boot, and, frankly, they're prettier.

We try to be really careful about what we plant, never plant anything invasive. And the good news is the vast majority of climate-adapted, non-native species are not invasive. They thrive in this climate, which as you rightly point out is a really odd one, between the wind and the salt air and the odd summers that are never hot and the odd winters that are never cold, they create a kind of richness, and they also house a surprising amount of biodiversity. The birds don't know the difference. We have hooded orioles (*Icterus cucullatus*) nesting in *Phoenix canariensis* palms. And Anna's hummingbird (*Calypte anna*), I mean, they don't care what color flower it is and what continent the flower comes from.

So we've got this incredible richness. What's most important is creating cover. And so part of what we try to do on the Tunnel Tops, for example, because it is a land bridge, was to create these mast shrub plantings that allow wildlife to move from the Chrissy Field area—where the marsh is and the upland areas of the marsh—through the site, up to the main post over the freeway, so that small mammals and birds could more easily move back and forth. And that's why you see there's so many mastrum plantings on the

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site, again, using a lot of things in Proteaceae, salvias, lots of grasses, other things like *Lomandra* and lots of *Carex*. These climate adapted, I think of it as sort of horticultural coastal scrub is what we've tried to create. Even up in the historic heart of the main post, a goodly number of natives as well, that we can use in a way that reinforces the historic character of the site.

Sarah Beck: I think this kind of pragmatism around climate-adapted plants that can support a fair amount of wildlife mixed in with the natives for the special relationship needs. As you mentioned, this is such a constructed landscape. This is managed. Nobody's pretending this is some kind of wild, untouched wilderness landscape. So, it was interesting to me to hear how much research you all had done and thinking about the pressure of being next to freeway. I was surprised to hear the noise, although noise reduction was being worked on for the human side.

Apparently, the birds weren't terribly affected, or at least they were adapting. What I was told was that some of the, some of the worst issue was around light pollution and that the frogs were having some trouble?

Michael Boland: Yeah. I mean the environmental impacts on wildlife, honestly, there's something that we have begun to understand but don't fully understand. It's complicated. We know there are white-crowned sparrows (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*), for example, that change their song depending on the amount of ambient noise that they have in their environment.

Yeah, light pollution is a huge issue, and we worked really hard on the project and throughout the park, too. It's not just the project and it's not just our park. National parks all over, I think, are really leaders in preserving the dark sky. The thing about the Tunnel Tops is the lighting is all very low wattage, and also low to the ground, literally. We did it for wildlife, but we also did it because the sky is so glorious. People come and they look at the stars or they watch the ships come in under the Golden Gate Bridge at night. It's truly spectacular and the last thing you want is for people to have to be staring into big light fixtures. Instead, they get to be there and it's just magical at night. I mean, truly.

Part of the value proposition, if you will, of The Presidio is when you come into the gate, it feels like you're in a kind of urban wild. The amount of noise drops. You hear hawks, you see hawks in the sky, a coyote will run by you on

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the trail. The amount of ambient noise drops, even though the freeways are there cutting through the part, the air is clean. You smell eucalyptus and pine and cypress. You were transported to another place experientially and the light pollution is a piece of that. And we wanted to reinforce that feeling of otherness, of being away from the city, of being in a magical place through the lighting design, as well.

Sarah Beck: I want to bring up your children's garden as well.

I feel like all of these human different human experiences, as you were saying, just add up to this overall feeling of being connected to nature, connected to the space. I will say that Richard Turner, who is a former editor of Pacific Horticulture and did contribute to the plant selection of this project, I think he visits The Presidio every week, but I believe the nature play area is a stop every time, and he has tested all of the features.

I did get a little feedback from my eight-year-old. She tested the features as well. Can you speak a little bit about the nature play aspect of the design and how this is really not a playground that has like typical playground equipment?

Michael Boland: Okay. First, I have to know. Did we pass the test?

Sarah Beck: Oh, oh, excellent. I mean, yes. Richard and my daughter were both very positive.

Michael Boland: Good. I was more worried that your daughter, than Richard, okay good, okay, I can relax now.

Sarah Beck: Well, I mean, my daughter is the child of the superintendent of parks, so she does a lot of playground testing.

Michael Boland: Well, she's an informed consumer. I like that.

So, in the process of planning for the Tunnel Tops in the very early days, we held this competition, and we hired these five firms.

JCFO (James Corner Field Operations), the ultimate designers were one of the five firms, and they developed five outstanding ideas, really beautiful visions, five concepts. And we tested them with the public and we got an

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enormous amount of feedback about the five schemes, but also about things that weren't in the schemes.

It was interesting that a lot of the feedback we heard about was about how hard it is to raise a child in San Francisco, and a lot of anxiety about the impacts of urban life. There's been a lot of writing about nature deficit disorder and the physiological impact of lack of access to the outdoors. And of course, in COVID we saw how vitally important access to the outdoors is.

Sarah Beck: Absolutely.

Michael Boland: None of the schemes really addressed the life experience of urban kids. And so that became something that once we got through the process, once we selected JCFO, we went back to them, and we said this is an important element that's missing from your scheme and was frankly missing from all the schemes. And we want to come up with a kind of play environment that really expresses what it means to be in a national park.

We didn't want it to be like any other playground and fundamental to the idea of national parks is this idea of risk, right? National parks are risky. I remember in graduate school, I read this book called *Mountains Without Handrails*, it's a great book by the way, and it was all about national parks and how in an environment like that, you're not going to put handrails everywhere. There is going to be risk. And if somebody falls off half dome, if they're hiking on half dome, they accept the liability of hiking on half dome.

And so, this notion of national parks being places where people can take risk, as a way of building a sense of confidence, a sense of mastery, and also having fun, because that's what draws us to these places, right? We're challenged physically. And then we master the challenge and that makes us want to do more. And that gives us a sense of confidence.

Well, one of the things we heard was that children living in cities never had those opportunities. There aren't trees in parks, there aren't trees they can climb on. There aren't unexpectedly random kinds of experiences they can have because most city playgrounds are so structured, and they're really designed to minimize the liability of cities, frankly. They're all plastic and steel and rubber and all that good stuff.

We asked ourselves, "What would a national park playground be?" There were a few answers that immediately came to mind. The first is that the

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experiences would tie to the site's history and ecology. And as I mentioned earlier, The Presidio is really rich in both. So we had a lot to work with. The second is it would be based on this notion that people can challenge themselves, and in the course of challenging themselves, and take some risks, not significant ones.

Sarah Beck: Still within somewhat of a safe environment, right.

Michael Boland: Yeah, beneficial risks is the term of art, right? Take some risks and they could, as a result of those risks, develop a sense of mastery and then want to challenge themselves a little more. And that this is core to the life experience of kids developmentally.

They came up with concepts that used only natural materials and that embraced this notion of beneficial risk. And the result is the 'Outpost' and it's really designed to allow kids to engage with nature at their own pace, to build a sense of mastery. Some of the experiences they'd have in a bigger national park.

There's this area that's focused thematically on the bluffs and there are big piles of rocks that they can climb on, and they can amble up the rocks and then go down the slide as opposed to going up a little staircase. and they're out there just having a ball climbing up the piles of rocks.

I think the other thing, and this is just as important. It's not just about helping kids develop a healthy relationship to the outdoors. It's about building future stewards, right? That we live in a world where you only value the things that you can have experienced directly. Most people, they're not passionate about things they've never touched or never been in or never enjoyed. If we care as conservationists and as lovers of the outdoors about the future of parks and protected areas, we need to find ways for a broader cross section of our community to fall in love with nature and the outdoors, and to develop that sense of confidence and to develop that yearning to go further so that we are building future stewards for the planet and building future stewards for our parks and protected areas.

So that's the other piece of this, is that this space combined with the 'Field Station', which is adjacent to it, which is like the alter ego of the 'Outpost'. If the 'Outpost' is all about gross motor skills and being outdoors and physical activity, the 'Field Station' is the opposite. It's about connecting with nature,

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EPISODE XIX:

Thrilling Humanized Nature in the Anthropocene with Michael Boland

using your five senses and your fine motor skills. That those two things together were really conceived of as a piece.

We know not every child's the same, they don't connect to things the same way. Some live in their heads. Some live in their bodies. Some are really good at fine motor skills, some gross motor skills, but both provide ways for young people to connect to nature. And with the hope that they'll want to learn more, and they'll want to spend their lives either working in environmental fields or spend their lives advocating for the importance of nature.

Sarah Beck Can you just sort of give the piece of advice to the other cities, landscapes, other places in our Pacific region? I don't know how many pieces of historic military national park spaces there are, but I'm certain that there are many industrial edges of dense urban environments, that there are pieces of park land that are ripe to have some sort of enhancement that could allow these types of interfaces for the humans that inhabit these cities.

Can you give some advice? I know these partnerships were probably really complex. What would you tell the city planners and the parks people and the all the people in these communities that are going, 'How would we achieve some of these successes that The Presidio is a model of?'

Michael Boland: Yeah. There are many, many ingredients, you're absolutely right, but there are two that are really, for me, the most important.

The first is **thrilling for me, that we are finally, finally, embracing the Anthropocene. That we are finally embracing and accepting the reality that the world is dominated by humans and that we need to free our minds to think about nature in a new way, and that we need to think expansively about the different things that look like nature and things that create ecological value because those are two really different things.** And I think we conflate them all the time.

I mean, it's the terrible legacy of the picturesque, I know a lot of people are talking about this, but it's amazing to me, the extent to which we are still trapped in that dichotomy. People walk through cities, and they can't imagine nature existing in these places, well, it can exist anywhere. Ecological value can exist anywhere. And so, I think the first thing is this

conceptual leap and we all as land managers and landscape architects and gardeners, we have to make the leap.

This landscape is so weird. We have birds nesting in demolished apartment buildings on Alcatraz. I mean, it's the craziest, craziest landscape. **So, I think the first piece is that, we have to free our minds and accept that nature is not what we were taught it was and that if we are really concerned about biodiversity and about addressing the climate crisis, that we need to think in a completely different way about where nature lives and what it looks.** How we relate to it. So that's the first thing.

The second thing is, it takes a village to do everything and every project we've ever done has required so many different people.

They've been better because of it. One of our community partners in the Bayview (a traditionally underserved and underrepresented San Francisco Community) who is giving us feedback how to make The Presidio truly a place that's truly welcoming to their community, whether it's a kid who lives up the hill that wants to spend their life as a park ranger and first connected with nature, watching hawks down in the Tennessee Hollow Watershed below their home.

All of those various forces can come together around parks. **It's one of the few democratic platforms that remain in our cities. They're free. They really are for everyone.** They always have been a place. They maybe haven't welcomed everybody. They haven't been good at that. They fall prey to the same kinds of prejudices and pressures and tensions that the rest of cities do. But most fundamentally, they're one of the few remaining democratic platforms in our communities.

And so to me, the important thing is that anyone working in this space be open to that and embrace that notion that it's our responsibility to make sure that everyone that is an owner of these open spaces, which is everyone, that they be part of the process. They be part of the conversation and that we listen with equal intensity to everyone about what these places should be.