

Experiment in Parks

Vest-Pocket Concept to Get First Test on Prime Land

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The night people will be replaced by day people when the site of the Stork Club on East 53d Street is turned into one of the city's first model vest-pocket parks.

Instead of orchids and perfume for debutantes in the dimly lit black and silver boîte,

there will be coffee and sandwiches

An for shoppers and Appraisal strollers in a tree-shaded open plaza

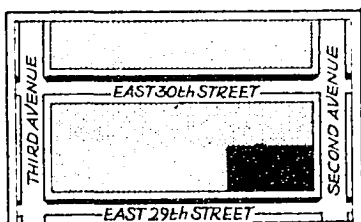
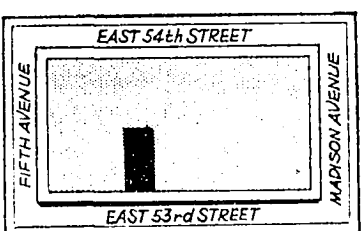
with the sounds of the city muffled by a background waterfall. On East 29th Street, in a second vest-pocket park there will be a place for nature study and tree houses where the first leg of the 30th Street expressway had been planned. The park, on land acquired by the Triborough Bridge and Tunnel Authority and leased to the Parks Department temporarily, will feature sitting plazas, pools, play timbers and a snack shop, instead of automobiles.

Contrasts in Ideas

The two parks, models of excellent design, are like a small electric charge of new ideas that could change New York's park and playground program from moribund to trend-setting.

But if they are alike in their high standards, they are also a study in contrasts. The Samuel Paley Plaza on East 53d Street is a highly sophisticated concept for a shoppers' and strollers' oasis, elegantly conceived for an elegant part of town. The 29th Street park is a direct response to neighborhood wishes for mixed, community pleasures, and although the means are almost equally sophisticated in terms of design, the effect is of simple, disarming delight.

Both parks, however, are



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 Park sites shown in black

more than charming ideas, charmingly executed. They will serve as laboratory demonstrations of the costs and practicality of the vest-pocket park thesis, the cherished idea of park associations and urban designers that would introduce small, green public spaces of block or building size into congested areas where parkland acquisition is no longer possible.

Violates Economics

The thought of this kind of use for prime land in New York makes real estate men blanch. There is no more uneconomic use of a 42-by-100-foot plot, such as the one on 53d Street, costing approximately \$750,000, than to add \$250,000 more in amenities with no return income except the price of those sandwiches. The laws of economics and the good of the public seldom mix. Obviously, only public action or private philanthropy can make the small-park dream possible.

The Paley park carries the clear suggestion that New York's private foundations and philanthropies may have their work cut out for them. Even the 29th Street park is being financed in part by the New York Community Trust, and in part by the Triborough

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An Experiment in Park Design: Tiny Oases on Prime Real Estate

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Authority. The creation of small parks not only involves the purchase of land and the design and execution of facilities, but also—and just as important — the establishment of endowments for maintenance.

At present maintenance is the Achilles heel of the New York parks program. While it is quite possible to provide sufficient funds in the city's capital budget for land acquisition and design, and the Parks Department will be doing so this year in several areas including Harlem vacant lots, the operating budget consistently lacks funds for upkeep and operation.

Both undertakings, therefore, will be models not only of design, but also of procedure —

purchase, execution, operation and maintenance. They are also models of two qualities essential to New York's public programs—generosity and style.