

# Credit to Originators

## Successors Are Outshone by Olmstead And Vaux, Who Designed Central Park

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The first architectural competition held by the Parks Department since 1907, and the second since Central Park itself was designed as the result of a competition in 1858, has proved one thing conclusively: You can't beat the original architects, Olmstead and Vaux.

But that unbeatable pair have taken considerable punishment in the intervening years.

An Appraisal Frederick Law Olmstead and Calvert Vaux created

840 acres of picturesque landscape in the English tradition, embellished with enchanting Victorian "fancies" that have been poorly understood and less well-preserved by succeeding city administrations. Exotic cast-iron traceries have been replaced by plumbers' pipe. The style of refreshment pavilions—the subject of this competition—has changed from Vaux Gothic Revival to Moses Blockhouse.

### Doll House Modern

The new refreshment kiosk will be neither. It is Toy, or Dollhouse Modern. Its simple component parts combine to provide charm without frills. If the 19th century wallowed in sentimentality, the 20th rejects it. The prizewinning design is a contemporary solution that will not violate its picturesque setting. Its advantages are flexibility, portability and a suggestion of gaiety.

But its "unit," standardized parts cannot possibly be "prefabricated," as the design wistfully specifies. They will necessarily be handcrafted for the single prototype that will be built, and the kiosk will never be made in great enough quantities for mass production, or for the savings and efficiency that prefabrication implies.

In its way, therefore, by using the vocabulary and rationale of unit construction for largely decorative effects, this solution is about as exotically romantic as anything by Olmstead and Vaux.

It is fortunate that the second- and thirdprize designs will never be built. In terms of expensive impracticality, production problems and elaborate unsuitability to simple needs, they are prize-winners of another sort.

What the competition did point up conclusively, however, is the desirability of an open

design door in city programs. The Park Department is to be commended and encouraged in its program. It has also been made clear that the design problems in the parks are neither simple nor easily solved.

The competition program specifications included the statement that "the new city administration has taken the view that the park is a significant historical work of art and is seeking as much as possible to re-establish the original design intent of the architects." None of the designs fulfills this purpose. The obvious implication is for a Contemporary solution with more than a hint of nostalgia in form or spirit.

### Exotic Mixture of Tastes

The blue-ribbon jury that chose the winners could have taken a prize of its own for an exotic mixture of tastes. It ranged from Henry Hope Reed Jr., the Central Park Curator, historian and die-hard traditionalist, who has pointed out repeatedly that it was Olmstead and Vaux's avowed purpose to keep everything possible out of the park after its initial programming and construction, to Paul Rudolph, the avante-garde architect, for whom history begins and ends circa 1960.

Juries are traditionally "hung," or "loaded." This one hung for a while, and then was pushed into aggressively 20th-century solutions by its modern-minded majority. The decisions were far from loaded on the side of Olmstead and Vaux.