

Matching Need and Design

Unpalatable as we find all encroachments on Central Park, the solution the Parks Department has devised for the problems involved in building a police station and stables alongside the 86th Street transverse represents an exceptionally sensitive blend of need and design.

The department's decision to invite competition brought some of New York's best architects into public service and produced a design of notable quality and taste. It sets a record in concern for the primacy of nature over building. To put it simply, grass won.

By placing the new police station along the transverse road, where the old one already exists, and by using the natural slope of the land to keep the construction underground for the police and public stables, the architects, Kelly and Gruzen, have bowed to the designers of the park, Olmsted and Vaux.

The most controversial question is the inclusion of the riding ring—a structure with a thirty-foot rise and sloping grass sides. Its location is flat fill of the 1930's that is not part of the original Olmsted pastorate, and it has been handled as landscape architecture in the best sense.

The riding ring falls in a twilight zone between necessity and encroachment. It would clearly be indefensible if the demolition of the 94th Street Armory had not orphaned the park's mounted police and if more of them were not required for park patrols. The inclusion of public horses and the expansion of the police training ring for spectator sports, on this particular site and handled in this particular fashion, is a plausible extension of the program.

Many past park changes have been tasteless intrusions of concrete and asphalt, and they are, unfortunately, still there. In this case, the balance of site, purpose, need, solution and advantages weighs heavily on the side of the proposed design.