

The Architect's Newspaper

The Great Lawn

Downtown Cary Park in North Carolina by OJB and Machado Silvetti creates a new square in the Research Triangle

By [Daniel Roche](#) • December 7, 2023 • [Architecture](#), [Landscape Architecture](#), [News](#), [Southeast](#)



The new 7-acre park by OJB and Machado Silvetti has four pavilions at each corner of the park. (Tzu Chen)

North Carolina's Research Triangle, a geographic area buffered by Duke University, University of North Carolina, and Wake Forest, is the third fastest growing region in the country. Today, the area touts one of the highest concentrations of tech companies in the U.S. Its picturesque towns of Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill attract and retain young professionals looking for high quality of life well-connected to nature.

In Cary, North Carolina, a city of 176,000 people west of Raleigh, [OJB Landscape Architecture](#) and [Machado Silvetti](#) have delivered a new, 7-acre downtown park that

redefines the town. The square park bordered by four active streets in the heart of Cary has ample amounts of open green space as well as programmed areas based on historic, cultural, and environmental needs.



The park is bordered by four active streets. (Tzu Chen)

Since 1990, Cary's population has nearly tripled. In recent years, it's also become a hotbed for entrepreneurs looking to settle in the Piedmont region. This year, Cary was even listed in the Top 100 Places to Live by Livability.

The new park in downtown Cary adds important public space to the bustling North Carolina town. Spread throughout the site designed by OJB are four pavilions by Machado Silvetti which, according to the architects, take cues from the rich language of the Piedmont region. Each pavilion uses naturalistic materials like zinc, stone, and wood; an homage to vernacular architecture in Piedmont.

Conversations about a new central park in downtown Cary were first circulated over twenty years ago when the Town Council approved a plan for one in the early-2000s. In 2018, OJB was hired to update a master plan for the park with collaborative contributions from Machado Silvetti. Then in 2019, the Town Council approved a bond measure to support the park with 77 percent approval. That same year, the Town of

Cary adopted a comprehensive master plan. As reported by *AN*, renderings of the park were later released in 2021.



The pavilions use natural materials. (Tzu Chen)

Throughout the park, shade gardens, perennial gardens, wetland and aquatic plantings, pollinator gardens, and native meadows abound underneath generous tree canopies. The square is centered by Academy Plaza and Pavilion which features a vast stormwater pond that helps collect and detain rainwater across the park. This was important given that the site has a 30-foot grade change.

The Great Lawn Pavilion is another important park feature. It houses concerts, scheduled programs, and a slew of civic and community events for the Town of Cary. Not far from the Great Lawn is The Nest, a nature-inspired play space for younger visitors characterized by a rustic palette of climbing elements. The Park Street Courts offer visitors of all ages recreation space. To move through the landscape visitors can elect to meander through the paved walkways or take the long route on an elevated that zigzags through the site. Metal railings and a sculptural, nest-like piece are installed along the elevated walk.



Park-goers can pass through the park either on paved walkways or an elevated structure. (Tzu Chen)

On a separate corner of the park, The Gathering House & Gardens provides seamless indoor-outdoor spaces that offer intimate areas for community, family, and corporate gatherings. Close by is The Bark Bar, an open-air beverage pavilion-slash-restaurant to the park's eastern edge. Here, an S-shaped structure gives people access to active and social recreation areas.

The new park by OJB and Machado Silvetti also posits space for public art installations. Separate pieces by artists Laura Hadda, Tom Drugan, Carolyn Braaksma, and Mat McConnell are each included on site. A forthcoming piece *L'île Folie* by Marc Fornes is slated to arrive in Cary early next year.



The park features public installations. (Tzu Chen)

According to Cody Klein, a partner at OJB, the new park is informed by Cary's needs. "We heard from the community in many public forums," Klein said in a press release. "Making a new park is a generational opportunity to express how people want to come together to build community and experience nature. The new park does this and more, with spaces for every age group, ranging from children and families to nature lovers of all ages."



The architects explained that they blurred the line between buildings and landscape. (Tzu Chen)

Jeffrey Burchard, principal of Machado Silvetti, added: “We intentionally blurred the line between buildings and landscape. Our collaborative approach led us to a design that is both sustainable and socially responsible. The park structures are intimately wed to how the community will gather for performances, celebration, and enjoying the company of each other.”

Downtown Cary Park’s ribbon-cutting ceremony took place early December, attracting over 35,000 visitors.

[OJB and Machado Silvetti design Cary Park in North Carolina \(archpaper.com\)](http://archpaper.com)