

## Cal Anderson Park named one of 12 best city parks in U.S. by Forbes.com

### America's Best City Parks

There's a unique sense of peace and quiet to be found in the middle of some of the country's busiest places.

From botanical gardens to ice skating rinks, from jogging paths to bison paddocks, a great city park can contain multitudes. But beyond their physical features, the best urban oases may well be defined by a feeling.

"Your whole sense of place changes when you go into a successful city park," says Alan Tate, author of *Great City Parks*. "They give you a feeling of going away without leaving town."

Tate explains how Frederick Law Olmsted, the founding father of American parks, talked about the need for "long spaces that you could dream away in"--one of the prominent features, in fact, of the Long Meadow in Brooklyn's Prospect Park, which Olmsted designed with Calvert Bowyer Vaux shortly after the Civil War.

Olmsted's work, says Tate, "was very much based on the whole idea of the mental health effects of going into green space."

But if a great city park has a transporting effect, it must also be deeply connected to its urban surroundings.

"It's one of the main differences between a city park and traditional national park, which can stand more or less on its own," says Peter Harnik, director of the Center for City Park Excellence at the Trust for Public Land in Washington, D.C. "A great city park has to be a beautiful space that also has a great relationship with the city."



When a federal regulation required drinking-water reservoirs to be covered, Seattle took the opportunity to make its Lincoln Reservoir roof double as park space. The result, says Peter Harnik of the Trust for Public Land, was "beautiful parkland." The recently redesigned space, in Seattle's Capitol Hill neighborhood, includes paths, wading pools and playing fields.

### The List

Central Park, New York City  
Golden Gate Park, San Francisco  
Grant Park, Chicago  
Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY  
Post Office Square, Boston  
Audubon Park, New Orleans  
Cal Anderson Park, Seattle  
Boston Common, Boston  
Encanto Park, Phoenix  
Patterson Park, Baltimore  
Oakland Cemetery, Atlanta  
Balboa Park, San Diego

## Escape Without Leaving

The 12 parks on our list, comprising suggestions from Harnik and Tate, run the gamut in size and features, but each in its own way offers a sense of escape.

As an example, Harnik points to Boston's Post Office Square, a small (1.7 acre) space that he says "completely revolutionized" an area of Boston's financial district. Its designers moved a dilapidated concrete parking structure underground and built the park on top of it. Today Post Office Square is packed at lunchtime, and performance spaces and an outdoor restaurant extend its use beyond business hours.

One of the principle features of American city parks, says Tate, is their "sheer size," a legacy of Olmsted and others in the 19th century--who argued for more expansive spaces for city parks.

But vastness alone doesn't make for a great city park. In fact, Tate notes that some of the smallest city enclaves, wherein the noise of a waterfall drowns out the din of traffic, can offer as much respite as a massive metropolitan greenscape.

It's the big, famous spaces, however, that are "high in everybody's consciousness," says Harnik. "Central Park in New York or the new Millennium Park in Chicago are very high-visibility parks that get millions of visitors and add a tremendous amount of pizzazz to a city."

But there's a world of "more modest neighborhood parks" that Tate says are lesser-known gems.

Patterson Park in Baltimore, for example, is steeped in history; it was the site of Union encampments during the Civil War, and houses several unique, historic buildings. It's also full of present-day pleasures--skating rinks, pavilions and playgrounds--that connect the surrounding neighbors to the space.

