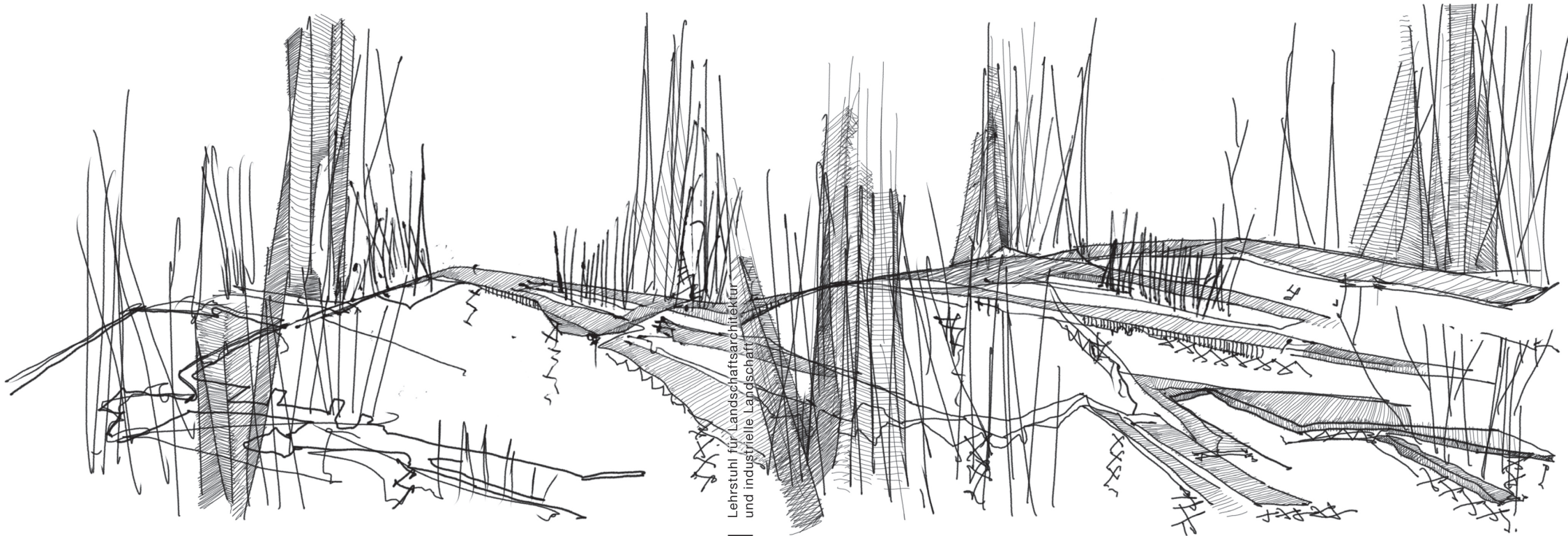


INSPIRATION HIGH LINE

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The Curious Gardeners

Anna Thurmayr

For six long months, about the time of a Canadian Winter, the story of an inquisitive little boy named Liam and his courageous quest to transform a rustic railway into a flourishing garden captured my children's attention and imagination. They were fascinated by Liam's heroic efforts to transform a big grey city into a lush green place and were lulled to sleep by the boy's humble and curious nature.

The Curious Garden by Peter Brown was published in 2009. Liam discovers a dark stairway leading up to a forgotten world of an old rail line. The first thing he notices is a coloured patch of dying wildflowers. Without hesitation Liam becomes a gardener. He has no experience in how to tend to plants and gardens, yet he intuitively knows his help is needed. As he waters and prunes, listening to the grasses and flowers, the garden expands to redecorate the dull city into a beautiful habitat.

The story of Manhattan's High Line project also began with a small local initiative that grew over time. Two local advocates founded the "Friends of the High Line" group and championed the railway's reuse and preservation. The transformation of the rusty railway viaduct resulted in a vibrant public space with a thriving garden flowing and meandering above New York's busy streets. A testament to its grassroots beginnings, the landscape was further enhanced by the many new and eager gardeners who unexpectedly pitched in to help.

We used to ask what would New York be without its *Central Park*? Now we can ask what would New York be without its High Line? And further, what is a garden without its curious gardeners? "Friends of the High Line" successfully raised several million dollars and continues to solicit capital and local volunteer efforts to keep this infectious ideal alive.

In the past, Le Nôtre would have been unable to create the world's most celebrated and influential gardens without the king's orders. Today, however, community involvement in the planning process of a landscape project has become almost standard. Passionate private individuals together with public stakeholders have replaced the traditional client's orders. What's more, the conversion of Manhattan's High Line invoked an even higher communal engagement, and these caring citizens still invest their own time and money, as the vast majority of funding does not come from government or municipalities. This prestigious project marks a turning point in participatory design process and goes far beyond the standard public workshops and hearings.

What we can learn from this masterpiece is that the role of the landscape architect is also being challenged to transform. Community support is necessary and imperative to turn a designer's imaginative drawings into realized designs. It calls for well-versed professionals to use their resourcefulness and critical thinking skills in order to create tangible ideas not just *for* people, but *with* them as well.

One thing remains true. Gardening still evokes the delight of new discoveries. Nature can still thrive in the most unlikely of places. And the hopeful message of Liam and the High Line may in fact triumph over many problems of the man-made world. •