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POSTED

December 9, 2015

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MAP



Northwest corner of East Main and North Second streets

Barry Starke

1972. 1998, redesigned

Monroe Ward (the downtown district defined by Broad, Foushee and Belvidere streets and the James River) boasts some of Richmond’s most iconic architectural treasures: the [Jefferson Hotel](#), the [Commonwealth Club](#) and Linden Row. What the neighborhood lacks however, is green space. The exception is Library Park, a welcome treat—surprise really—behind the behemoth [1972 library building](#) that fronts East Franklin Street. This pocket park is an exquisite example of how a collaborative civic effort—in this case the City of Richmond and the Garden Club of Virginia— can create something useful, soothing and beautiful.

A park had occupied this quarter-block site since the 1970s when the main library was expanded to its current dimensions, but was unresolved from a design standpoint, under programmed and barely maintained. The earth berms and towering willow oak trees that still give form to the space were planted at that time. Fast forward to 1998, the trees have matured and now form an impressive canopy. What landscape architect Barry Starke has added is a low-lying, simple granite fountain with a gentle water flow (reminiscent of designs by Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi, 1904-1988) and comfortable new benches. Importantly, a new sturdy black cast iron fence of traditional design at the sidewalk line defines the outdoor space and establishes a sense of enclosure. One doesn’t feel enclosed however—the everyday hustle and bustle of passing traffic and the city beyond becomes part of the experience, while not being part of the park. A large clock near the intersection establishes a pleasant and practical focal point for passersby.

When public and private funding sources were combined to create the welcome and welcoming urban amenity, an endowment was also established for ongoing maintenance as well as occasional programming such as readings and musical performances.

Of course it’s great for year-round contemplation or enjoying a book, weather permitting.

E.S.

Photograph DOK



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