

Joe Riley Waterfront Park

Charleston, South Carolina

Photographs by Alan Ward 1998, 2023-2024

Notes on the Making of the Photographs

Stuart Dawson of Sasaki designed the eight-acre Charleston Waterfront Park working closely with the city, including Mayor Joe Riley, who was personally involved in providing leadership to implement the park, as well as design input. It was completed in 1990 and renamed in 2018 to recognize his role in creating the city's most visited park. The initial planning for the waterfront began in 1978, the year that I joined Sasaki.* The site had remnants of piers and wharves, while the uplands were used mostly as parking lots. The waterfront plan envisioned a 1000' long park, infill development on vacant parcels, as well as two new parking garages to replace the surface lots for the French Quarter district that bordered the site. Sasaki's collaborative approach included in-house planners, landscape architects, architects, as well as civil and waterfront engineers. This integrated approach to the design led to a plan for capping the contaminated soils, elevated grades for coastal resilience, new piers constructed, and a salt water marsh planted to partially re-establish the former coastal ecology along the Cooper River.

I first photographed the site in 1998 with the aim to illustrate three key principles guiding the design: make connections from the historic district to the water, establish distinctly different zones of use in the park, and vary the design treatments at the interface with the Cooper

River. View corridors and pedestrian paths extend from the French Quarter to key features or landmarks in the park. Queen Street, the principal route from the historic district at the north end, is terminated at a plaza and circular fountain with a ring of jets converging at a central granite disk (1-3). The plaza and fountain transition east to a pier extending over five hundred feet into the Cooper River, along with an additional pier parallel to the ship channel, where there are views of passing boat traffic, dolphins surfacing, and the harbor islands - including Fort Sumter (29-34).

The large central portion of the park has a curving bulkheaded edge lined with palms, overlooking the planted salt marsh (20-27). Four rows of live oaks and small garden spaces with traditional benches follow the western edge of the park with views over the lawn toward the water (4-7). The Pineapple Fountain is the landmark - central to the scheme and derived from historical iconography used in Charleston (9-11). Adger's Wharf extends into the river at the south end of the park and is more of a functional connection to the water, popular for fishing, and is adjacent to a working waterfront further to the south (15-19). This popular park reconnects historic Charleston to the water, attracting nearly four million visitors a year, and has been recognized with seven national awards.

List of Photographs

1. View west of circular fountain at end of Queen Street, 2024
2. View south of circular fountain, 2023
3. View south of circular fountain, midday, 1998
4. Gate at north end of park, 2023
5. Live oak allée and infill development at west edge, 2023
6. View north of circular fountain and live oak allée, 1998
7. View north of and live oak allée, early morning, 2024
8. Granite disk at east end of Gendron Street, 2024
9. View south of Pineapple Fountain, 2024
10. View west of Pineapple Fountain and City Gallery, 2024
11. View east of Pineapple Fountain, 2023
12. South end of bulkhead at east end of Exchange Street, 2024
13. Transition from bulkhead to path along salt marsh, 2024
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15. View east of pollarded trees at Adger's Wharf in summer, 1998
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17. View east of Adger's Wharf, 2024
18. Fishing at Adger's Wharf, 1998
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20. Live oak allée and path along bulkhead, 1996
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23. View east to pier, salt marsh, early morning, 2024
24. View east to pier, salt marsh, evening, 2023
25. View south of path along bulkhead, 1998
26. View south of lawn, 1998
27. View east of Cooper River, 2024
28. One of three bronze maps of evolving city form, 2024
29. View east of pier, early morning, 2024
30. Porch swings on pier, 2023
31. View south from pier, 2024
32. View south of pier parallel to the Cooper River, 2024
33. View north of pier parallel to the Cooper River, 2024
34. View to Fort Sumter, distant harbor island at center, 2024













































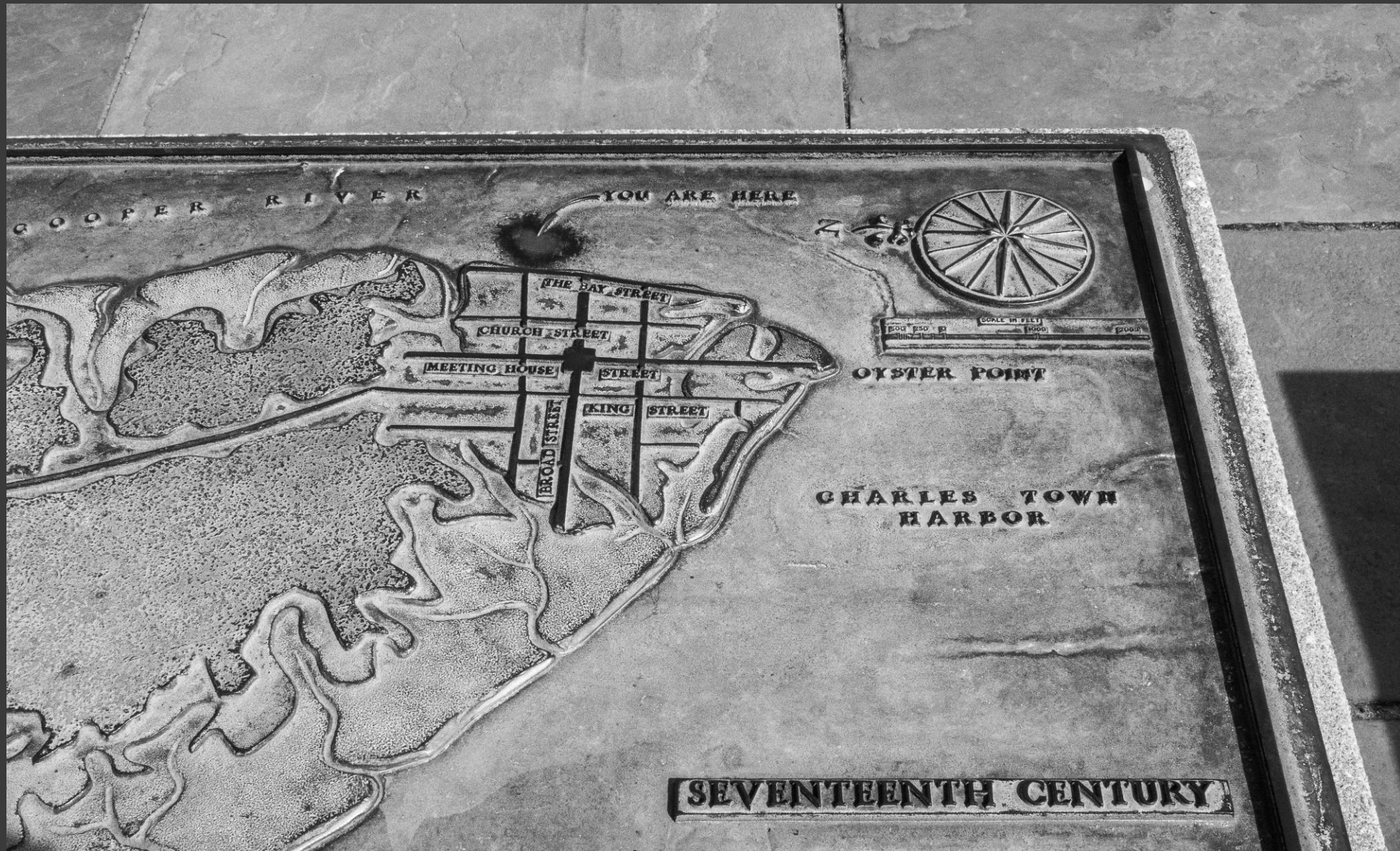
























Notes

Selected Publication of the Photographs:

Sasaki Associates: 50, Academy Press, 2003

* While I didn't work on waterfront park, I followed it closely from the initial planning stage through design and implementation, along with other Sasaki projects in Charleston. Recently, I worked on planning studies for the redevelopment of Union Pier, just north of waterfront park along the Cooper River.