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Dive In! The McCarren Pool Is Almost Open

OPENED in the summer of 1936, the hottest on record in the United States, the McCarren pool, on the Greenpoint-Williamsburg border in Brooklyn, was one of 11 unveiled across the five boroughs that sweltering season, a statement in concrete of the city's ability to do something big in the depths of the Great Depression. McCarren's capacity said it all: 6,800 swimmers in a 55,440-square-foot basin. Now, after being shut for 28 years, the pool and its historic bathhouse are set to reopen at the end of June.

The pool complex, which sits in McCarren Park, has undergone a \$50 million restoration, and the enormous rectangular pool has been turned into a giant U, with the placement of a concrete beach at its center. Painters are applying a coat of cerulean blue, a hue evoking longings of escape — from the heat, from work, from summer in the city. Grab your suit!
— LISA W. FODERARO



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times



New York City Parks Photo Archive



Kitra Cahana/The New York Times

FRESH IDEA When it opened on the Greenpoint-Williamsburg border, the McCarren pool was an alternative to the polluted rivers and bays where New York City children had been swimming, and it drew a crowd, as seen in July 1937, left. But after sliding into disrepair, the pool closed in 1984. And while the 10 other Robert Moses-era pools were renovated in the 1980s and '90s, McCarren remained stubbornly shut amid bitter and racially charged debates over its fate. Some in the traditionally Polish and Italian Brooklyn neighborhood lobbied to have the complex torn down. Preservationists advocated for the restoration of the bathhouse and pool to their original size. Others pressed for a smaller recreation space.

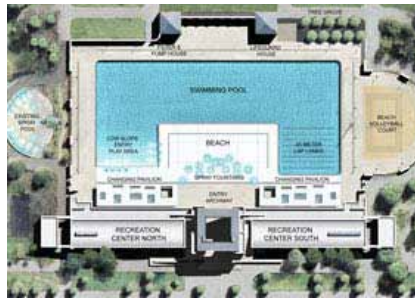
Starting in 2005, the empty pool became a site for cultural events, drawing throngs (like the one above, in 2007) to listen to music, take turns on the Slip 'N Slide and generally turn the basin into a hipster playground.

Capturing a Public Space's Faded Glory

REDESIGNED In 2007, Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg unveiled his PlaNYC, with a huge capital infusion for new parks and park renovations. Eight lucky properties in underserved areas were identified as "regional parks," getting \$290 million among them. McCarren was one. As seen on the plan that Rogers Marvel Architects has created, a plaza is at the center of the pool, nicknamed "the beach." It will be flecked with spray fountains that shoot water into the air, and become a skating rink come winter. It will also create three distinct swimming areas.

The new design preserves many historical details, like the grand arched entrance on Lorimer Street. The bathhouse, originally used only for changing

and showering, has been converted to year-round use. One wing will house a recreation center, with a weight room, basketball court and cardio-fitness room, while the other wing will contain space for after-school programs and community meetings.



Rogers Marvel Architects



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

Aerial shot of the McCarren Park pool.

Novel Uses for Objects Recovered From New York City's Past



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

The pool is being painted from the edges inward.



Scott Demel/Rogers Marvel Architects

OLD TOUCHES While architectural elements were plundered during the pool's closing, there are nods to the past. Hundreds of wire mesh baskets once used by bathers to store their belongings, were discovered in storage. So the architects dipped them in silver paint and affixed them to the ceiling of the fitness center.



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

The sleek benches are made of reclaimed wood from the Coney Island Boardwalk.

Building a Spot for Serious Recreation



Fred R. Conrad/The New York Times

NEW FEATURES The current pool is still very big, with a capacity for 1,500 swimmers. It covers 37,571 square feet and holds 1,057,914 gallons of water. A giant underground filtration system uses tanks filled with sand and has a turnover rate of 2.9 hours, which means it circulates 6,080 gallons a minute. At right is the basketball court.



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