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Instilling a poetics of place is a goal of Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates (MVVA), the famous landscape design firm that has created successful public spaces in some of the country's most challenging urban sites. In these locations, nature offers not so much an escape from city living as a teasing dialogue with built structures. The whole experience is aimed, as critic Paul Goldberger notes, to "make you see everything, city and nature alike, with a striking intensity."

Richly illustrated and handsomely designed, this is the first publication to explore a wide range of MVVA's projects, focusing on the firm's trend toward sites requiring complex technological solutions. Leading critics and historians look at twelve projects, dating from 1992 to the present, and each posing a challenge_such as contamination, isolation, and lengthy public approval proceedings. They explore the process through which the firm researches such issues and how solutions are embedded in the final aesthetics and spatial structure of the sites.