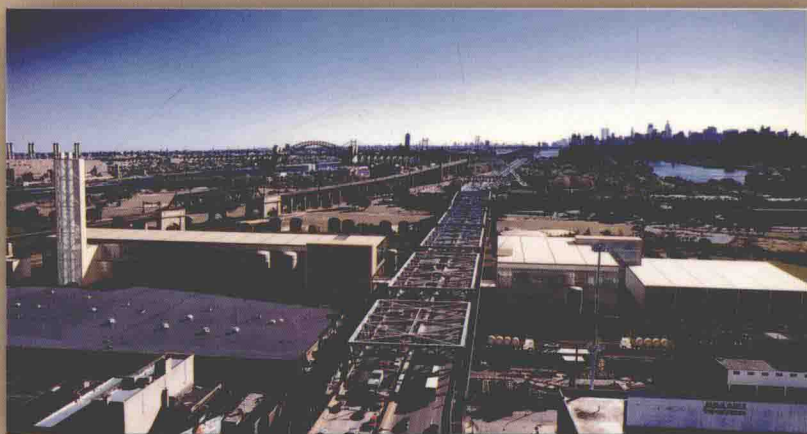


# BRONX ECOLOGY

BLUEPRINT FOR A  
NEW ENVIRONMENTALISM



Allen Hershkowitz

Foreword and Original Designs by  
Maya Lin

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# Bronx Ecology

## ABOUT ISLAND PRESS

Island Press is the only nonprofit organization in the United States whose principal purpose is the publication of books on environmental issues and natural resource management. We provide solutions-oriented information to professionals, public officials, business and community leaders, and concerned citizens who are shaping responses to environmental problems.

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The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is a nonprofit environmental research and advocacy organization with more than 550,000 members. Since 1970, NRDC scientists and attorneys have been working to protect the world's natural resources and improve the quality of the human environment. NRDC has offices in New York; Washington, DC; Los Angeles; and San Francisco. More information is available at [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org).

*For Dylan, Lea, and Connor  
and, especially, for Meg*

If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost;  
that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them . . .

—Henry David Thoreau

## FOREWORD

When Allen Hershkowitz first approached me in 1993 to become involved in a project that would bring a large-scale paper-recycling plant to an abandoned industrial site just outside Manhattan in the South Bronx, I was only too glad to be involved, not solely from my interests as a designer but also from my concerns as an environmentalist.

His idea that recycling paper should be brought nearer to the source was groundbreaking. We would no longer mine virgin forests for paper mills in rural America, but harvest the urban forests that modern times have created, in cities where we generate more than enough wastepaper to take the place of our virgin forests. It was a precedent-setting dream that connected an environmental group, NRDC, with a community-action group, Banana Kelly, with government and unions and numerous paper companies throughout an almost eight-year process during which the Bronx Community Paper Company, the BCPC, took shape. The journey the BCPC took, from an abandoned rail yard in the South Bronx to paper mills from Maine to Sweden—where Allen and I and a few other courageous and hopeful souls traveled to learn, and to teach—is the story told here.

Allen always had faith that good design needed to be a strong part of the equation. I attempted to create a design that would showcase the recycling process—educate visitors about the importance of recycling, create a sense of community for the workers at the plant, and create a building that would give a sense of identity to the project. But I also felt I had a responsibility to not jeopardize the project with additional design costs.

Even if design were not a factor, the plant would mean so much to the community and to the environment.

The BCPC was an idea that perhaps was ahead of its time—at least in this country, where, sadly, the price of milk is higher than that of gasoline and it is cheaper to sprawl out in rural America than rebuild parts of our inner-city landscapes. But it was important to put forth the idea as a possibility: an idea that *should* happen. While we worked on this project, sky-high returns on technology stocks seemed like such a sure bet that no one was even considering investments in something like a real factory, regardless of the social and environmental vision behind it. And the politics of New York City at the time made certain the BCPC couldn't overcome that. It certainly wasn't for lack of effort.

Sometimes, as tools for us to learn from, ideas on paper are as important as physical structures. When the Municipal Art Society produced its 1997 show *Designing Industrial Ecology: The Bronx Community Paper Company* in its main gallery at Rockefeller Center during Christmastime, it was both to present the project and to educate people on what was possible.

We came surprisingly close to realizing a project that would have been an amazing collaboration between environmentalists, community, industry, and design. The idea that Allen put forth and that this book chronicles has been—and remains—of interest to numerous countries, city officials, designers, and international agencies across the world—in Europe, in Asia, and in dozens of cities throughout the United States. To me, we built an idea, one so fully formed that I look forward to when it can give fruit. This book is a guide for that time.

MAYA LIN

New York City, 2002



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Many people provided assistance to me during my eight-year effort to develop a recycled-paper mill in the South Bronx, and during the two years I spent writing this book about it. A few others, also acknowledged, provided valuable guidance, information, or inspiration. In all cases, these fine people, colleagues, and friends alike are blameless and the errors that may have crept into this work are mine and mine alone.

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Thanks especially also to my NRDC co-workers and trustees Sarah Chasis, Tom Cochran, Bill DeWind, Mark Izeman, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Maya Lin, Joel Reynolds, Jonathan F. P. Rose, Larry Rockefeller, Jacob Scherr, Greg Wetstone, and Fritz Schwarz.

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I owe huge professional and personal debts—and have a great admiration for—Per Batelson, Rick Campbell, and Rich Schrader, all of whom helped me conceptualize the Bronx Community Paper Company

(BCPC) project, compassionately implement its development, and sort through the many complex issues that arose almost every day we worked on it.

Thanks as well to all my NRDC colleagues and trustees, with whom I am truly blessed to be able to work each day. They assisted me—or consoled me—during the BCPC development effort and the drafting of this book. I owe a special thanks to Dan Saccardi, who helped research data; prepare tables, diagrams, and charts; check footnotes; maintain files; and contribute to editing this text. Without him this would have been a much less accurate and enjoyable endeavor. Thanks also to Robert Borque, Liz Barrett-Brown, Mitch Bernard, Henry Breck, Jennifer Burns, Ralph Cavanagh, Thomas Chu, Anjanette DeCarlo, Bob Denham, Robert Ferguson, Mike Finnegan, Bob Fisher, Ashok Gupta, Kate Heaton, Ari Her-showitz, Gerry Hauxhurst, Rich Kassel, Kit Kennedy, Chuck Koob, Ruben Kraiem, Brian Lake, Jonathan Larson, Nancy Marks, Tim Martin, Maribel Marin, Alan Metrick, Peter Morton, John Murray, Mary Nichols, Alex Perera, Juliet Rogers, Lynne Shevlin, Lisa Speer, Johanna Wald, Rob Watson, George Woodwell, and Sami Yassa.

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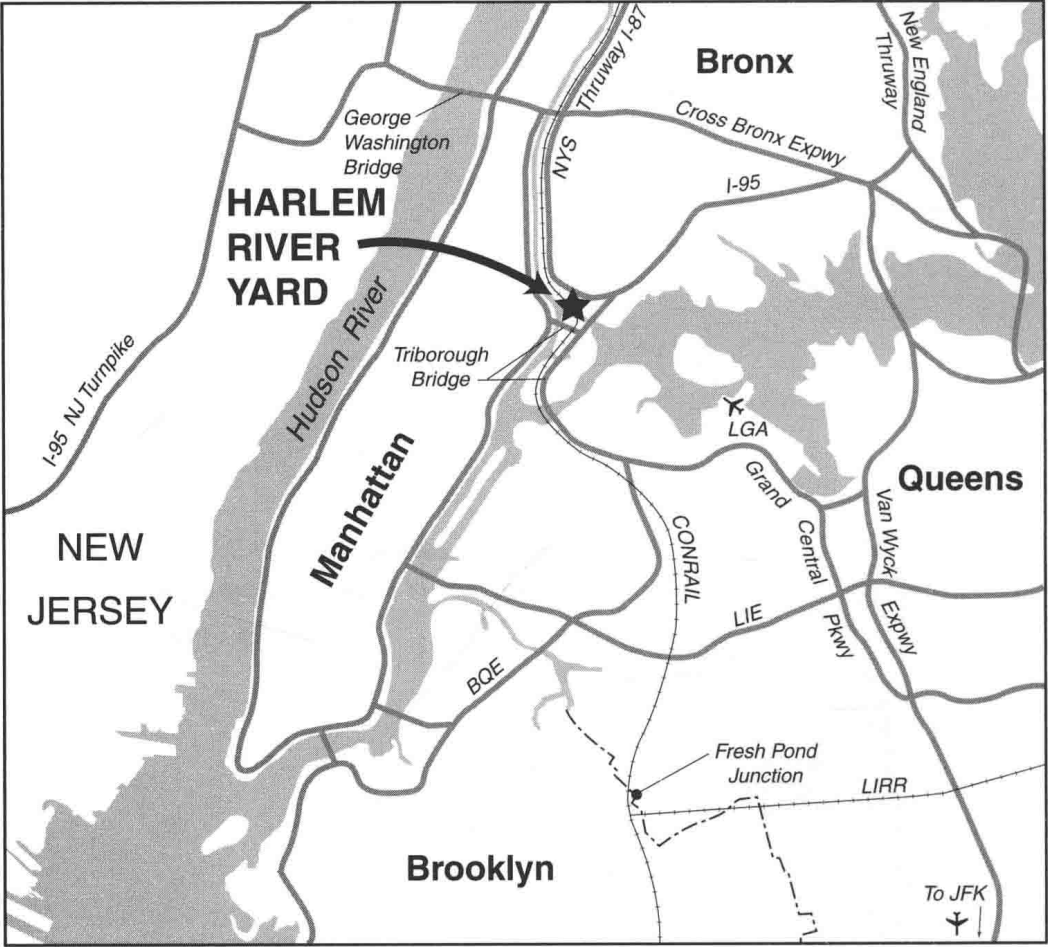
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And above all, thanks to Dylan, Lea, Connor, and Meg, and to Helen, Leon, Suzanne, and Michael. Words cannot convey my gratitude and affection.

*It may be said there exists no limit to the  
blindness of interest and selfish habit.*

—Charles Darwin



Location in New York City of the Harlem River Rail Yard, site of the Bronx Community Paper Company.

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## *Introduction*

### The Hopes behind the Bronx Community Paper Company

I tackled one job after the other for which I was not qualified. I had a self-confidence that was scandalous.

I didn't appreciate all the possible dangers  
and things that could go wrong.

—Ernst Mayr

IN 1992 I DECIDED to develop a world-scale recycled-paper mill in New York City at an abandoned rail yard—a brownfield, as former industrial sites are known—in the city's poorest zip code, in the South Bronx. It was a project designed to marry environmental remediation and economic development. Although I initially intended the project to be large enough to have a meaningful ecological and market impact, the project's scale and complexity grew well beyond anything I had originally imagined. At an anticipated cost that would ultimately have exceeded \$500 million, its facilities were to include an integrated recycled-paper mill, a wastepaper de-inking plant, a newsprint paper-making machine, a wastepaper sorting plant, and a steam boiler. (See mill site plan on pages 2 and 3.) If it had been completed, the Bronx Community Paper Company (BCPC) project would have helped remedy many environmental problems—described later in this text—and produced 2,200 jobs during construction (for 22 months) and more than 400 full-time, permanent jobs. Just before the project met an untimely