

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF DESIGN

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Connecticut Cottages and Gardens

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**WALLPAPERS**  
THIS SEASON

**BEDROOM**  
UNDER THE STARS

**TREE HOUSE**  
FOR ALL AGES



# FRESH START





SPOTLIGHT

# Southport Park Redux

A LONG-AWAITED REDESIGN DELIVERS A GREEN OASIS WEDGED BETWEEN THE TRAIN TRACKS AND I-95

Architect Mark Finlay never stops playing—or wanting to. From his office, he looks directly into Southport Park, an 11-acre expanse of woodlands, hills and tumbled rocks that he redesigned. “Right now, I can see people walking their dogs while kids run over footbridges,” he says. “Earlier, I saw a teacher lead her class on an exploration.”

What was once a scrubby parcel of land wedged between train tracks and I-95 has been transformed into a public oasis. “When we started on this project three years ago,” explains Ellen Levinson, treasurer of Friends of Southport Park, “it was rundown, not well marked and, at best, the kind of place where kids gathered to drink beer. Now, wildlife, birdlife, and plant life, all of which is native to Connecticut, is flourishing.”

Finlay was hired by the town’s committee in charge of revitalizing the park to create a place that would become a new focal point within central Southport. “What we all wanted to accomplish,” he explains, “is to make this land more useable for adults, kids, dogs, walkers, everyone.”

Part of Finlay’s plan involved creating destinations within the park destination itself. He constructed a 40-seat amphitheater out of stone and situated it at the entrance, along with small fort-like dwellings, stone steps that undulate from low-lying areas to higher elevations, and vaulting footbridges over a natural creek. A viewing platform allows kids—though Finlay says he sees far more adults on it—the opportunity to watch passing trains.

To traverse the park’s full circuit takes approximately 15 minutes, though people spend far more time in the enclave. This represents at least the second incarnation of Southport Park. Back in 1912, the then owner—a railroad company—cleared the land of trees, but concerned citizens immediately reacted by buying back the parcel and replanting it. Only recently, though, has it assumed its present identity, the result of a \$400,000 fund-raising campaign.

“Mark was a great asset for us,” says Levinson. “He, too, saw it as a little gem just waiting to be given some attention.” —David Masello



**Green Scene** (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP) At Southport Park, a new viewing platform allows visitors to watch passing trains. Signage clearly marks the trails. Small fort-like dwellings were built at various intervals. Black-eyed Susans add a bright note. A creek can be crossed with new footbridges. For more, go to [southportpark.org](http://southportpark.org).

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HELEN KUSSER DUPING