EAT: Edible Art Tours of the Senses is a proposed park for the site bounded by First Street, Judge John Aiso Street, Temple Street and Alameda Street in Los Angeles, at the northern edge of Little Tokyo. Today, this site is mainly surface parking but contains an important community asset- the Go for Broke Memorial. Several arts and cultural assets exist along the edge of the site such as The Geffen, East West Players and the Japanese American National Museum. This project aims to activate the site and provide a park for residents, people who work nearby, visitors and tourists.

The site was proposed as an Art Park in 2011 by the Community Redevelopment Authority (CRA) and Bureau of Engineering but was never developed due to the CRA's dissolution. In fall 2012, as part of the course “Design Skills for Urban Planners” Master of Planning students participated in a five part design process to develop an Art Park design proposal for the site. Under the instruction of Assistant Professor Liz Falletta, student groups undertook a semester-long iterative design process to generate design proposals while analyzing the site, its context, precedents, stakeholders, opportunities and constraints.

Throughout the semester, guest speakers provided feedback and perspective to the student projects, ideas and proposals. Guests offered urban design and architectural expertise, and some represented actual stakeholders for the project, such as the Little Tokyo Service Center and the City of Los Angeles. This proposal represents the work Christine Dang, Jared Johnson and Alison Spindler generated through the design process.

Vision
The vision for this Edible Art Park is to create an environment that not only nourishes the flesh, but also the soul. By joining together art with food this site will create a multisensory experience for visitors like no other park. In addition, this provides an opportunity to enhance the health of the community by providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as a community garden and a community center that can facilitate an active and healthy life.

A sizeable portion of the site will be reserved for larger plants like fruit trees; this “food forest” is influenced by the existing Go For Broke monument - the monument boundary itself used as a guide for the landscaping grid, as well as the four pillars representing the forests of Europe where the Japanese-American soldiers battled; the theme of the forest is also mimicked in the structural “tree” canopied columns running across the hardscaped areas of the site. Also, a community garden will be included on the roof of the parking structure, which has been redesigned to include underground as well as aboveground parking. This urban food forest both embraces the current culture and history of the site as well as promotes a new vision for the future.

The entrances to the site are marked by steel trellises that are similar to the existing trellis located at the Geffen Contemporary. This will create a unified atmosphere connecting the original uses of the site with the contemporary ones. The connectivity to the Metro Station will also be enhanced. Additionally, to facilitate movement and exploration of the site a meandering path that guides visitors from the entrances into the park has been added. Guests are encouraged to leave the path and to explore the site at their own pace. If the path is followed fully it will lead guests to the center of the site which incorporates an interactive water feature. This water feature will combine sound and light to create a fun experience for children and adults, as well as provide a space for people to clean the food they have collected at the park.

Goals
• Turn what our site is today, a dead space, into a valuable community asset, which will be measured by the park’s usage.
• Integrate the nearby community & cultural assets into the park so that it is a focal feature for nearby communities. This will be measured by how much the park gets used for community organizations or their events, and local resident satisfaction measured through feedback surveys.
• Design a park that draws nearby residents, people who work nearby, and visitors from afar.
• Help visitors to the park think about food in new ways through our edible theme, in order to promote fresh food. This will be measured by how and if the edible features are used by park goers.
• Use the park as a unifying force for the varying neighborhoods it borders, instead of simply adding on to Little Tokyo, as measured by the diverse types of visitors to the park and the community organizations that utilize the space. Resident and community surveys will help to measure this success as well.

Values:

• Animation: providing elements that will promote visitor interaction with movable/modular landscaping and water/light/sound features based on human movement.
• Function: areas of the park to have hardscape for heavy pedestrian and equipment usage, another area to have softscape for lighter usage and an additional area to be of varying paving materials for a mix of heavy and light usage.
• Complimentary mixed uses: a proposed edible park would be at the disposal of the neighboring restaurants who could then expand their limited dining area to the provided seating in the park.
• Participation: that all stakeholders will have a voice at the table to ensure a design and project that is useful and meaningful to those it will serve.
• Sustainability: an edible park and the features we are proposing must be exceptionally well thought out in order to work in the long term.
• Wayfinding and accessibility: this park must be accessible, safe, and useful to nearby residents and visitors alike, which we aim to achieve through our park’s entrances, pathways and open feel.
• Economic Development: this park is also meant to be a draw for visitors to Little Tokyo and the surrounding areas. The park provides an opportunity for local businesses to promote their services to a greater audience.

Existing Conditions
Understanding the context in which a site exists is one of the most important steps in developing a design proposal. The proposed Little Tokyo Art Park location has many site forces, opportunities, and constraints that all need to be taken into consideration. Our site forces diagram explains the unchangeable elements of the site that will impact the project. Little Tokyo is one of the oldest parts of Los Angeles and has many historically designated buildings. Additionally, the surrounding views of Downtown LA connect the site to the rest of the city. These were two important points we wanted to address. Additionally, the rail location is not welcoming to guests and our project wanted to address this issue. Transit and accessibility were important parts of our original site analysis and that is why we included site inventory diagrams showing existing transit locations, vehicular and pedestrian circulation, as well as sidewalk widths.
Southern California’s mild climate gave us the opportunity to create a site that is not a typical art park. The Go for Broke monument’s allusion to the forests of Europe inspired the idea for an urban forest and through our site design we hoped to emphasize the monument’s status in the park. Go for Broke, a Japanese-American veterans group working in education, is also one of our many stakeholders and we believe that an edible park with educational programming is a way to connect all the different stakeholders together. The surrounding community has many elderly residents and the museums draw students to the site. These visitors will have the opportunity to learn about fresh fruits and vegetables and how to prepare healthy meals in the park’s kitchen. The age populations and existing arts and culture assets have also been diagramed.

By addressing these existing conditions the EAT Park is tailored to the surrounding community. This park has both its own strong identity, but is also flexible so the site can be used for a wide variety of purposes by local businesses, community organizations, and many others.

Design Proposal
Edible Art Tours (EAT) Park is a park that invites the local community as well as those just passing through to come, pause and stay for a bit.

The overall theme of the park: a highly vegetated and edible area in the urban fabric of Los Angeles, is organized into two sets of radial patterns to encourage movement from one end of the park to the other and across each side. The dominant radial path centers upon the existing Go For Broke monument as an anchor and a destination to highlight this otherwise overlooked, but important, memorial. The secondary radial, a much smaller pattern, sits at the southern end of the project site among the existing buildings to help tie into the southern, heavily pedestrian street.

On the eastern side of the primary radial path are small grids with groves of trees - the food forests - with each section arranged in complementing flavors with clusters of sweet and sour. It is the intent to provide alternating year-round blooms and harvest within each section as well as a water feature that is interactive as well as a source for cleaning the fruits and vegetables. Bamboo benches are located adjacent to the fountains as a place to rest, eat and enjoy the food forest.

The western side of the primary radial path will house a new parking structure that provides below-grade parking as well as a rooftop community garden for the community. The structure will be bisected on grade for a pedestrian path connection from Judge John Aiso Street into the park. This bisecting path also serves as the divider between the two ground-level uses of the parking structure: an open plaza on one side and a test kitchen on the other.

This test kitchen welcomes chefs, cooks and amateurs to use the facility and the vegetation within the park to provide demonstrations, lessons and training skills to the community and visitors. The exterior face of the structure will also have removable modular panels covered in appropriate vegetation.

Southeast of the primary radial sits the existing Geffen Contemporary at Moca as well as the Japanese American National Musuem. To the southwest will be a large paved area with tables and seating directly in front of the Geffen Contemporary gathering spaces. Further beyond towards the west will include an additional food forest with the savory flavor cluster. Additional trees, bushes and herbs will also be located in large mobile planters, allowing flexibility of the uses in the space with the ability to relocate the planters with relative ease.
The radial path entrances are marked by trellis structures similar to the existing structure in front of the Geffen Contemporary, unifying opposite ends of the site. Along the main paths and scattered throughout will also be large structural “tree” columns that can be made from various material and by various artists. These columns mimic the food forests in structure while serving the purpose of lighting in addition to providing a location for vine growing plants. An access drive is also being maintained to the rear of the buildings fronting First Street.

**Conclusion**

EAT: Edible Art Tours of the Senses offers visitors an educational, interactive experience with edible plants and trees containing fruits, vegetables and herbs to try throughout the park’s food forests. Other programs such as seating, water features, and a rooftop community garden on the site provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy the park on their own or partake in more formal programming. The aim is to provide flexible yet interactive park space that can be enjoyed by a multitude of user groups. The park’s design is adaptable so that it can evolve with future community needs.

This proposal offers design solutions to activate the currently under-utilized site. As Little Tokyo, the Civic Center district and all of Downtown LA continue to develop, this site could connect its surrounding neighborhoods and the people who live and work within them. EAT would also attract visitors and tourists, a major benefit for the restaurants, businesses, and arts & culture organizations adjacent to and near the site. EAT would provide program and programming for a variety of ages and users. The design is attractive and exciting, yet flexible enough to adapt to stakeholder feedback and evolving community needs. Although this proposal is the result of many iterations and progressions, like any good urban design project, it will keep evolving as the project does and must remain open to adaptation to serve the stakeholders and communities the design was created to benefit.
Summary & Vision

EAT: Edible Art Tours of the Senses is a proposed park for the site bounded by First Street, Judge John Aiso, Temple Street and Alameda Street in Los Angeles, at the northern edge of Little Tokyo. The CRA & Bureau of Engineering proposed the site as an art park in 2011, but the project never moved forward. Today, this site is mainly surface parking but contains an important community asset - the Go for Broke Memorial. Several arts & cultural assets exist along the edge of the site such as The Geffen, East West Players and the Japanese American National Museum. This project, the result of a semester-long, iterative design process, aims to activate the site and provide a park for residents, people who work nearby, visitors and tourists.

EAT: Edible Art Tours of the Senses offers visitors an educational, interactive experience with edible plants and trees containing fruits, vegetables and herbs to try throughout the park's food forests. The forest is broken down by taste into sweet, sour, and savory groves. Other programs such as seating, water features, and a rooftop community garden on the site provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy the park on their own or partake in more formal programming. The parking structure has been redesigned to include underground as well as aboveground parking. It will feature a community garden on the roof and a ground level space with a gallery on one side and a test kitchen on the other. The park will improve the surrounding community’s health by providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and by facilitating an active and healthy lifestyle through the community garden. The aim is to provide flexible yet interactive park space that can be enjoyed by a multitude of user groups. The park’s design is adaptable so that it can evolve with future community needs.

EAT: Edible Art Tours of the Senses: planting the seeds of a strong and healthy community

Site Photos

Edible Art Tours of the Senses
Site Plan

Site Sections

Street Section

Streetscape Plan

Scale: 1 inch = 10 feet

KEY MAP

TEMPLE STREET

LEGEND

TEMPLE STREET

EAT