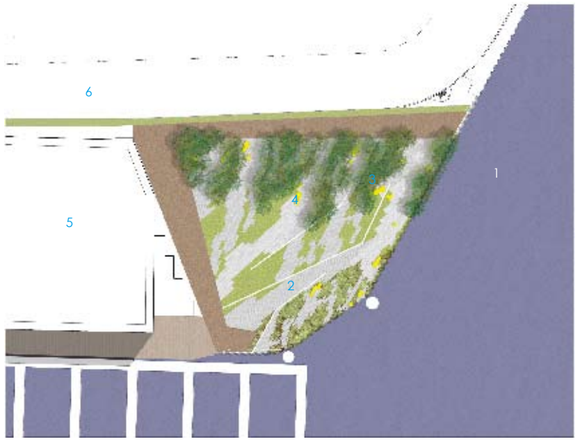
Erie Street Plaza

Location: Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA **Designer:** Stoss Landscape Urbanism
Photographer: Stoss Landscape Urbanism, Vetter Denk, James Dallman
Completion date: 2010 **Site area:** 1,208 sqm



1. Federal Channel to Lake Michigan
2. Concrete Pavers
3. Poplar Grove
4. Seating
5. Restaurant and Condominiums
6. Erie Street

The project grows from three hybrid ecologies that step down across the site towards the water: radiant grove, flexible field, and steel marsh.The radiant grove occupies the upper end of the vegetal gradient, at the plaza's urban edge. The poplar grove is positioned to shelter the rest of the plaza from cold winter winds yet are deliberately transparent to allow for views and safety. The grove maintains a dense straight line parallel to street edge but opens up toward the river. The primary element – the flexible field – is a hybridised plaza-green, with pavers and lawn surfaces that allow for both intense activity and more passive use. The plaza is articulated as an eroded field of custom pre-cast pavers distributed to maximise variability and flexibility.

The plaza's indeterminacy is accentuated by the erratic scattering of seatwalls and luminous fiberglass benches, which capture and reflect ambient light and project light from within. Their irregular placement allows for multiple and diverse social groupings or solitary retreats, in shade or full sun, protected or exposed. The luminous qualities of the fiberglass are accentuated as night falls, projecting light from within and reflecting the passing headlights of automobiles. The glowing benches have become a signature element of the project.

The variegated surface extends into the steel marsh, which occupies the lower end of the plaza gradient at the river's edge. Capturing and cleaning site stormwater, the steel marsh is key to the site's stormwater management strategy. Lowering the grade behind the bulkhead wall allowed for the collection of site stormwater in a perched position above the river, newly protected from industrial activities and barge wakes.

Right: The variegated surface extends into the steel marsh, which collects and cleans stormwater from the site