

SWIRLING PEOPLE IN

ARTIST'S FENCE BRINGS PIZZAZZ TO A MINIPARK.

BY MARTY CARLOCK



ABOVE

Most fence makers told artist Beth Galston her undulating design was impossible—but a daring fabricator made it work.

INSET

On an urban corner in Boston, landscape design by Ray Dunetz, ASLA, echoes a meandering fence.

IMAGE CREDITS

Bartek Konieczny, top; Clements/Howcroft Photography, bottom

The landscape architect Ray Dunetz, ASLA, and the artist Beth Galston had never met until they found themselves at a meeting to remake a tiny park called the South Street Mall in Boston's Jamaica Plain section. In 2007 the Boston Parks Department had hired Dunetz to redesign the strip; meanwhile, an organization called Jamaica Plain Centre/South Main Streets had held a competition for artwork on the mall. Galston, one of the city's foremost public art sculptors, was selected.

When the two were called to the initial meeting by the park's planners, Dunetz and Galston quickly decided, he says, that "even though we had separate clients, we would collaborate, blur the line between art and landscape."

The corner lot is small, just big enough for two tennis courts, and it had become derelict, a magnet for vagrants. Next to the tennis courts is a minipark, 30 by 125 feet, laid out on a grid. "There was no motion," Galston explains. "We wanted to whirl people in." They developed a plan they called a "swirl scheme," with undulating patterns of contrasting pavers underfoot and alongside curved planting beds. Even the gate to the tennis courts is a curled passageway.

A fence was needed to keep tennis balls in the court and out of the park. The collaborators saw that a serpentine fence—a practical work of art in keeping with the swirl motif—could replace the linear chain-link fence that had been in place. Galston had difficulty finding a fabricator willing to

make such a fence; she wanted to slant the posts as well as curve the fence. "The fence people all said, 'This won't work,'" she recalls—until she found Solutions in Metal in Abington, Massachusetts, which makes custom metal stair railings, unique fences, and the like. Its head, Bartek Konieczny, is an art school graduate who likes fabrication challenges.

Realizing Galston's design was harder than it looks. She made many small and full-scale mock-ups; then she and Konieczny had to transfer her concept to a CAD program that would guide CNC (computer numeric control) machines—cutters and tube rollers that formed the radii of the pipes. "We found we had to have rules," Galston says. "The posts could only be eight to 12 degrees out of vertical, and the radii of the curves ranged from 36 to 140 inches. The purpose was to stretch the chain link tightly so it formed continuous curves with no flat spots, but not so tightly the material deformed." Although it looks continuous, the fence is made in five sections; only two are similar. Galston bridged the small gaps between sections with narrow triangles of perforated metal.

The collaborators then chose a coating of purple vinyl for the chain link rather than standard black or green. Depending on the time of day, the color blends into the streetscape or pops into unexpected hues—at night, a dozen upward lights bring it to life. The fence cost \$75,000 out of a total budget of \$310,000, Dunetz said, which includes renovation of the tennis courts. ●