Visual Complexity
10. Does the design incorporate a wide variety of forms, colors, textures—fountains, sculptures, different places to sit, nooks and corners, plants and shrubs, changes in level?

11. If a complex view from the plaza is possible, has the design capitalized on it?

Uses and Activities
12. Has the plaza been designed to accommodate either lingering or passers-through, or if both functions are to be included, have they been provided for in distinct subareas of the plaza, to avoid conflict?

13. If people are encouraged to take shortcuts through the plaza, have barriers between the sidewalk and plaza, including grade changes, been eliminated?

14. To encourage people to stop and linger in the plaza, have dense furnishings, attractive local elements, and defined edges been used? If concerts, rallies, and so on are anticipated, have unimpeded open areas been provided?

15. Does the plaza design address the differences between men's predominant preference for a front-yard—public, interactive—experience and many women's desire for a relaxed and secure backyard experience?

16. Has the plaza been designed to encourage heavy use as a way to minimize vandalism and the presence of "undesirables" for those who want to render the slums indicating in the crowds, or has the design been hardened?

Microclimate
17. Is the plaza sited to receive maximum year-round sunshine?

18. Where the summers are very hot, is shade provided by means of vegetation, canopies, trellises, and so on?

19. As a city policy, is building height and mass controlled to preserve and enhance sunlight reaching public open spaces?

20. Does the plaza site have lumen temperatures above or about 53°F for at least three months of the year? If not, an additional indoor public space should be considered.

21. For those months when lumen temperatures average 59°F or more, have sun-shade patterns been calculated to predict where seating areas should be located?

22. Does glare from adjacent buildings create unpleasant visual and/or temperature conditions in the plaza?

23. Can light reflected off adjacent buildings be used to brighten the plaza's shadowed areas?

Preliminary Questions
1. Does the analysis of nearby public open space indicate that a proposed new space will be welcomed and used?

2. Have the client and designer determined the functions for which the plaza should be designed—a visual setback for a building, transition zone, lunchtime relaxation, bus waiting, sidewalks cafes, displays or exhibits, performances, mid-block pedestrian thoroughfare?

3. Have the correlations between block location and type of space been considered, either in choosing a location for the plaza or the outlet of the site planning for the entire development or in determining how best to configure and detail a particularly located plaza—high-use potential of a corner location or grade, oasis potential of a mid-block cul-de-sac location?

4. Assuming a catchment area of nine hundred feet, will a currently unused population be served by the proposed development?

5. Are there many workers in the catchment area to ensure a lunchtime clientele?

6. Is the plaza located near a diversity of people that can use it—workers, tourists, and shoppers?

7. Does the location of the plaza tie into an existing or proposed pedestrian system for downtown?

8. Does the local climate warrant providing a plaza? If an outdoor space can be used for less than three months of the year, an additional public indoor space should be considered.

Size
9. Taking into account that every location and context is different, have the suggestions by Lynch and Gehl been considered in regard to limiting the plaza's dimensions? Lynch recommended twenty-five to one hundred meters, and Gehl, seventy to one hundred meters—the maximum distance for seeing events—as comfortable dimensions.

Design Review Checklist

24. Have wind patterns been evaluated for the plaza site? Will windiness lead to noise, particularly in cities with marginally hot summers?

Boundaries
25. Do boundaries such as paving changes or planting define the plaza as a space distinct from the sidewalk without rendering it visually or functionally inaccessible to passersby?

26. Does the plaza have at least two sides exposed to public rights-of-way, unless it is intended to function as an oasis?

27. Have plaza design features such as plantings been extended into the public right-of-way to draw attention to the plaza?

28. Can needed grade changes between the plaza and sidewalk be kept below three feet?

29. Have the visual and functional transitions between the plaza and adjacent buildings been considered? Has the personal space of either the plaza users or the building users been violated by placing seating, tables, or desks too close on either side of windows or doors?

30. Do ground-level building uses enliven the plaza, incorporating retail stores and cafes rather than offices or blank walls?

31. Is outdoor cafe seating available in attractive colors to draw people in?

32. Have the plaza's edges been designed with many nooks and corners, to provide a variety of seating and viewing opportunities?

Subspaces
33. If it is a large plaza, has it been divided into subspaces to provide a variety of experiential settings for users?

34. Have such features as grade changes, planting diversity, and seating arrangement been used to create subareas?

35. Are subspaces separated from one another without creating in any of them a sense of isolation for users?

36. Are subspaces large enough so that users entering an area will not feel lost as though they are intruding if someone is already in that space?

37. Are subspaces scaled so that a person will not feel intimidated or alienated sitting there alone or with few others present?

Circulation
38. Has the plaza been designed to mesh with, or enhance, existing downtown circulation patterns?

39. Are plazas linked by a system of safe pedestrian walkways, malls, street closings, and the like, to encourage walking?

40. Has thought been given to predicting the direct routes between sidewalks and building entries that people will take at rush hours?

41. Does the plaza layout also allow easy access to a cafe, bank, or retail establishment peripheral to the plaza, access to seating or viewing areas, and opportunities for shortages or pleasant walk-throughs?

42. If there is a need or desire to guide pedestrian flows, have physical barriers such as walls, planters, bollards, or distinct changes in level or texture been used to do so, rather than color or pattern changes in paving, which have been shown to be ineffective?

43. Does the plaza design allow for the tendency of pedestrians to walk in the center of spaces and siters to gravitate to the edges of spaces?

44. Does the plaza accommodate the needs of the disabled, the elderly, parents with strollers, and vendors with carts? Do ramps parallel stairs whenever possible, or at least allow access to every level?

Seating
45. Does the design recognize that seating is the most important element in encouraging plaza use?

46. Does the seating meet the needs of the varying types of sitters commonly found in most plazas?

47. Has seating been placed in those locations that are sunny during lunch hours or, in very hot locations, where it will be shaded?

48. Does the plaza seating reflect that sitters are commonly drawn to locations where they can see other people passing by?

49. Has secondary seating around stairs, steps with a view, seating walls, retaining walls that allow sitting been incorporated into the plaza design to increase overall seating capacity without creating a sea of benches that might intimidate potential users when sparsely populated?

50. Is there at least as much primary as secondary seating in the plaza?

51. Are elements intended as secondary seating (with the exception of lawns) within the optimal sixteen-
thirty-inch height range (with emphasis on the lower end).

52. Have wooden benches been given high priority, and do they include those that are three by six feet and backless for flexible use?

53. Is some seating linear (benches, steps, or ledges) or circular and outward-facing to allow people to sit close to strangers without the need for eye contact or interaction?

54. Are there wide, backless benches, right-angle arrangements, and movable chairs and tables to accommodate groups?

55. Has seating been located to allow a range of choices from sunny to shady?

56. Has a sense of privacy been created for some of the seating through the placement of planters or other design elements?

57. Has a variety of seating orientations been included to allow water views, distant views, views of entertainers, foliage views, views of passersby?

58. Have seating materials been used that seem warm, such as wood, and have those been avoided that seem cold (concrete, metal, stone) or that look as though they might damage clothing if sat on?

59. In determining the appropriate amount of seating, has the Project for Public Space recommendation of one linear foot of seating per thirty square feet of plaza or the San Francisco Downtown Plan guideline of one linear foot of seating for each linear foot of plaza perimeter been followed?

**Planting**

60. Has a variety of planting been used to brighten and enliven the users' perception of change in color, light, ground slope, smells, sounds, and textures?

61. Have feathered-leaved, quasi-open trees been selected where a see-through effect to other subareas is desirable?

62. If a plaza must be sunken, have trees been planted that will soon grow above sidewalk level?

63. Have open-canopy trees been selected for windy plazas to reduce potential damage associated with dense foliage and high winds?

64. Have a variety of annuals, perennials, shrubs, and trees been selected for their color and fragrance?

65. Has the eventual height and mass of mature plants been considered in regard to views, shade, maintenance?

66. Have tree plantings been used that screen out adjacent building walls but that, if necessary, allow light to reach building windows?

67. Is there adequate seating so that people are not forced to sit in planted areas, thus damaging the vegetation? Are planter seat walls wide enough to prevent users from sitting in planted areas?

68. Do lawns vary the plaza's overall character and encourage picnicking, sitting, reading, sunbathing, sprawling, and other casual activities?

69. Is the lawn area raised or sloped to improve seating and viewing opportunities, and has it avoided creating a vast prairie expanse in favor of smaller, more intimate areas?

**Level Changes**

70. Have some modest but observable changes in level been included in the plaza design to create subareas?

71. Have level changes been considered as a means to separate seating areas and circulation?

72. If level changes are used, has a visual connection between levels been maintained?

73. Where level changes are incorporated, have ramps been provided to allow access to disabled people, those with baby strollers, and so forth?

74. Is there an elevated vantage point with a wall or railing to lean on while watching people?

75. Have dramatic grade changes between plaza and sidewalk (either up or down) been avoided, as such plazas will be undermined?

76. If a plaza must be sunken more than slightly, has some eye-catching feature been included to encourage people to enter?

77. If a plaza must be raised more than slightly, has planting been used to announce its presence and draw people upward?

**Public Art**

78. If public art has been included in the plaza design, will it create a sense of joy and delight, stimulate play and creativity, and promote communication among viewers?

79. Can people interact with any planned public art—touch it, climb on it, move it, play in it?

80. Is the art likely to speak to a large proportion of the public rather than an elite few?

81. Has a fountain or other water feature been included in the plaza design for its visual and aural attraction?

82. Will the sound of the fountain screen out traffic noise?

83. Is the fountain in scale with the plaza space?

84. Will wind cause water spray to blow, thereby making sitting areas unusable? If so, could a full-time gardener of plaza maintain be available to adjust the fountain?

85. Has the fountain been designed to be hands on, so that plaza visitors can interact with it?

86. Have the operational costs of running the fountain been calculated to ensure that the fountain can be operated?

**Sculpture**

87. If sculptural elements are to be used in the plaza, will they be scaled to the plaza itself?

88. Is some of the sculpture experiential, that is, can people sit around it, climb on it, alter its shape?

89. Is the sculpture located so as not to impede plaza circulation patterns and sight lines?

90. Has sculpture been located off center to avoid creating the impression that the plaza is merely a backdrop for it?

**Paving**

91. Do major circulation routes follow the plaza users' principal "dwell lines"?

92. If a designer's intention is to channel pedestrian movement, have cobblestones or large gravel been used where walking must be discouraged?

93. Has a change in paving been used to signify the transition from sidewalk to plaza without discouraging entry?

**Food**

94. Are food services available in and next to the plaza, such as food vendors, a food kiosk, or an indoor-outdoor cafe?

95. Are there comfortable places to sit and eat either a big lunch or food bought from a vendor?

96. Have drinking fountains, rest rooms, and telephones been provided to augment the facilities for eating, as one would find in a restaurant?

97. Have enough trash containers been distributed around the plaza to prevent littering of food wrappers and containers?

**Programs**

98. Do the plaza's management policies encourage special events in the plaza, such as temporary exhibits, concerts, and theatrical events?

99. Does the plaza design include a functional stage area that can be used for sitting, eating lunch, and so on during nonperformance periods?

100. Is the stage situated to avoid undue disruption to pedestrian circulation and to avoid making the audience face directly into the sun?

101. Will movable chairs be provided for the audience, and is there storage nearby for such chairs when not in use?

102. Are there places on the plaza to post event schedules and notices so that they will be readily visible to plaza users?

103. Is there a way to announce an event—decorations, banners?

104. Is there a place for temporary concessions to set up on event days?

**Vendors**

105. Has the plaza been designed to accommodate vendors, whose presence will add to the vitality of the space, provide a measure of security, and enhance the popularity of surrounding retail outlets?

106. Have vendors been considered especially for plazas that are already popular for lunchtime use, poorly used and in need of something to draw users, and/or sidewalk or transit plazas with many pedestrians?

107. Does the plaza include an area that can be used for a farmers' market?

108. When providing for a market or vendors, could a colorful fabric roof be provided for that area to draw attention to the facility, provide shelter and shade, and contrast with the scale of the downtown buildings?

109. Has the area for vendors or a market been situated so as to be easily accessible and highly visible, yet not impede regular plaza circulation?

**Information and Signs**

110. Is the name of the building clearly displayed and well lit after dark?
111. Is the main entrance to the building obvious?
112. After entering the building, is there an information/reception desk immediately visible, or are there at least clear signs to one?
113. Are there signs directing visitors to elevators, rest rooms, telephones, and cafeterias or coffee shops?
114. On leaving the building, are there clear signs indicating the way to transit stops, taxi ranks, and nearby streets?
115. Has a simple, clear map of the neighborhood been considered?

**Maintenance and Amenities**

116. Will there be adequate staff to maintain plantings so that lawns are green and trimmed, dead flowers removed, and so forth? If there is some question about the availability of maintenance, an effort should be made to use attractive yet low-maintenance planting.
117. Are there enough litter containers and a collection schedule that will prevent their overflowing?
118. Will lawns as well as shrubs and flowers in planters that double as seats be watered so as to be dry during lunchtime?

**Neighborhood Parks**

Clare Cooper Marcus, with Clare Miller Watsky, Elliot Insley, and Carolyn Francis

The premise of this book is that local variation is essential if designed spaces are to meet the users' needs but that some qualitative design guidelines also must be considered. The recommendations in this chapter are based on numerous park studies that observed activities, interviewed users, and analyzed what forms of design do and do not work for people. The guidelines are intentionally performance-based rather than prescriptive, and they are presented as component parts that can be applied to a specific design job or used to assess or develop a program for a park design. The chapter is divided into six sections: History of American Parks, Future of Neighborhood Parks; Literature on Parks; Design Recommendations; Park Typology; and Case Studies.

**History of American Parks**

Galen Cranz (1982) identified four major periods in the development of the American park since the mid-nineteenth century: the pleasure ground, the reform park, the recreation facility, and the open space system. The pleasure ground, which dates from the period between 1850 and 1900, was developed at least in part as a response to the overcrowded, unsanitary conditions of the newly industrialized cities. The model for this type of park was the aristocratic manor park of England and Europe in the Romantic period, which idealized wilderness and the pastoral landscape. Pleasure grounds, usually located on a city's outskirts, were intended for special Sunday outings and were characterized by large trees, spacious lawns, undulating terrain, meandering walks, and naturalistic water features. Here, it was hoped, workers would maintain their health through relaxed outdoor recreation, and the norms of middle-class behavior would rub off on the poor, as all social groups shared this public facility.

The reform parks, appearing around 1900, were an outgrowth of the Progressive and social work movements and, like earlier parks, were intended to improve the living conditions of working people. Located in the inner city, these were the first true neighborhood parks. Their primary intended beneficiaries were the children and families of the immediate neighborhood. Their most important feature was the children's playground. A reaction to what was seen as the elitist values of the Romantic landscape aesthetic produced a stark functionalism in the design of reform parks, which were defined by hard paving, buildings, and activity areas laid out in symmetrical arrangements using straight lines and right angles. Eventually the concepts of the social work movement were incorporated into mainstream society. The recreation facility, established in American towns and cities starting around 1930, severed the ties between parks and the goals of social reform, instead emphasizing athletic fields and equipment (the word recreation became synonymous with developed athletic facilities) and organized programs. With the growth of the suburbs and increasing automobile use, new and larger parks were built that provided myriad courts, swimming pools, and fields. The parks' catchment or service area increased, and transportation to the park was often by car. Physical exercise—team sports in particular—was deemed as important to maintaining morale in hard times as it was to the biological and public health purposes that had motivated earlier reformers.

The open space concept, which has developed since 1965, combines separate pieces of land, such as mini-parks, playgrounds, and urban plazas, into a system—in theory, at least. The open space idea grew concurrently with the urban renaissance that is part of the emerging appreciation of city vitality. The centrally located neighborhood park is only one of several potential dispersed locales (e.g., amusement parks, shopping centers, flea markets, street fairs, and state and regional parks) where people spend their leisure time.

Today, most neighborhood parks embody elements from all four periods of park history, and there are few, if any, pure types. Resistance to changes in parks may sometimes be traced to the belief that a park should con-