

# Innovation

---

Landscape architect Boris Timchenko faced a major challenge in creating the interior gardens of Watergate as most of the open grass area sits over underground parking garages, shops and the hotel meeting rooms. To provide views from both ground level and the cantilevered balconies above, Timchenko looked to the hanging roof gardens of ancient Babylon. An essential part of vernacular architecture since the 1940s, green roofs gained in popularity with landscapers and developers during the 1960s green awareness movement. At Watergate, the green roof served as camouflage for the underground elements of the complex and the base of a park-like design of pools, fountains, flowers, open courtyards, and trees.

With both curvilinear and angular footprints, the configuration of the buildings defines four distinct areas ranging from public, semi-public, and private zones. A strip of lawn punctuated by mature trees creates the transition from Rock Creek Parkway to the Watergate complex, encircled by a retaining wall. The primary public access to the interior yard is the elongated residential structure of Watergate East at the intersection of Virginia and New Hampshire Avenues. With loggia and cantilevered balconies, this curving structure embraces a boomerang-shaped courtyard housing two linked fountains and providing access to the shopping mall. The angular construction of the hotel and office complex form the northwest perimeter of the courtyard which is comprised of terraced lawn, trees, flowering shrubs, and a pool. Open to the Potomac, two adjoined semi-circular residential structures enclose a courtyard and pool. Mature trees are clustered into 150 concrete planters placed atop columns extending through the subterranean parking area to solid ground. The entire roof was covered with two feet of soil.

Today's landscaping renovation reflects the original residential garden plan, building on Timchenko's legacy with incorporation of modern ecological considerations including integrated pest management, watering, and maintenance.

# Watergate

---

Located at the intersections of Rock Creek Parkway and Virginia and New Hampshire Avenues, with sweeping views of the Potomac River, the Watergate complex is a group of six interconnected buildings built between 1964 and 1971 on land purchased from Washington Gas Light Company. The 10-acre site contains three residential cooperative apartment buildings, two office buildings, and a hotel. In 1964, Watergate was the largest privately funded planned urban renewal development (PUD) in the history of Washington, DC -- the first project to implement the mixed-use rezoning adopted by the District of Columbia in 1958, as well as the first commercial project in the USA to use computers in design configurations.

As envisioned by famed Italian architect Dr. Luigi Moretti, and developed by the Italian firm Società Generale Immobiliare (SGI), the project was a "town within a city" — transforming an industrial area into six luxurious residential and commercial buildings along the Potomac River. The dedication occurred on October 27, 1965 with the opening of Building One (now Watergate East). In 2005, the complex was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

Who decided on the name Watergate? While that bit of history is not clear, there are three main theories, which, when combined, add to the preservation of bits of Foggy Bottom and capital city history. There are the terraced steps leading to the river from the western side of the Lincoln Memorial known as the water gate steps. There is the famed Water Gate Inn that sat on the property between Watergate South and the Kennedy Center. There is the historic C&O Canal lockgate at mile zero.\*

---

*\*The zero milestone is noted by a granite marker just east of Thompson's boat house storage sheds, across a foot bridge. This marks the southern terminus of the canal where the lock regulates water from the Potomac into the canal.*

# Watergate Landscaping

---



Rockway Creek Parkway, Virginia and New Hampshire Avenues  
NW Washington, DC  
watergateeast.com

# Landscaping at Watergate Will Create Many Effects

By DANIEL POOLE  
Star Real Estate Editor

Landscaping is an important part of any building. But nowhere is it more important than at the new Watergate apartments now rising next to the site of the Cultural Center in Foggy Bottom.

The prominence of the 10-acre site itself, on the Potomac River at the Rock Creek Parkway, required careful consideration—especially since only one-third of the land will be covered with buildings.

When noted landscape architect Boris Timchenko tackled the job, however, he was faced with two immediate problems: The landscaping must look just as appealing from the many balconies high above as it does from the ground level. And although much of the land is open, most of it has underground parking below.

Timchenko solved the first problem by planning for clusters of trees with open spaces, flower beds and hedges between them. It will be a colorful view from the balconies, too, because the flowering trees, changing leaves and profusion of flowers will provide differing scenes throughout the year.

To support the trees over the underground parking facilities, Timchenko has designed 150 concrete planters which will be placed above columns extending down through the parking area to solid ground. The entire parking area roof will be covered with a 2-foot layer of soil, providing sufficient depth for grass, flowers and shrubs.

The \$66 million Watergate project will have five buildings—three co-operative

apartments, an office building and a residential hotel—located primarily on the outer portions of the site, opening the center portion and river side for landscaping.

The first building, Watergate East, is scheduled for completion next summer. Its main entrance will be an arcade leading to a two-story colonnade which features several fountains at various levels creating a waterfall effect. Landscaping in that area will give the atmosphere of a formal Renaissance-style garden.

But from the river side, Timchenko has insisted that there be no drastic break between the natural landscaping of the Rock Creek Parkway and that of Watergate. This will require a more informal approach.

Born in Lipezk, Russia, which he fled in 1920, Timchenko studied landscape design and agriculture in France before arriving in the United States in 1926. He established a design practice in Washington, D.C. and completed commissions for many prominent Washingtonians, among them Mamie Eisenhower and Jacqueline Kennedy, whose Georgetown garden was designed during John F. Kennedy's time in the Senate. His Washington, D.C. area projects include Tompkins Hall at The George Washington University, the National Geographic Building\*, and the Watergate. He also designed a garden for former Ambassador George McGhee at his estate, Farmer's Delight, in Leithtown, Virginia. Timchenko received awards from various organizations including the First Lady's Committee for a More Beautiful National Capital for his garden atop the Shoreham Hotel's Regency Ballroom, and the American Association of Nurserymen for his landscape design of the Washington Hilton Hotel. Timchenko passed away in 1975 and is buried in Rock Creek Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

His epitaph remembers him simply as "Landscape Architect."

\*Interestingly, Edward Durrell Stone (1902 - 1978), architect of the Kennedy Center, also designed the National Geographic Building.

# Bridges & Views

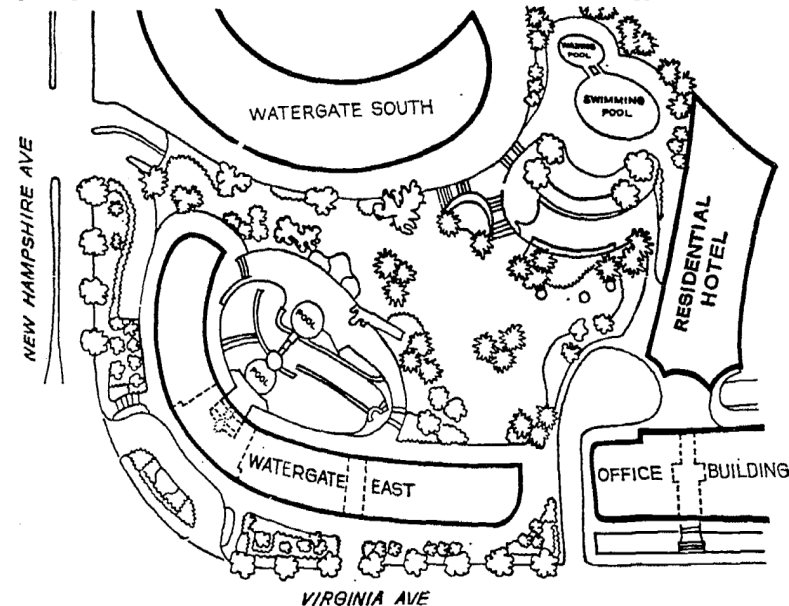
Luigi Moretti envisioned the buildings and the open spaces playing off each other yet melding together to create a bridge between the natural curves and manmade environments of this part of Foggy Bottom. Facing the street, following its curves, is an imposing city wall broken by the intersecting avenues. The semi-public interior green spaces curve to follow the river bank while framing the buildings, holding them together. The negative open spaces between the balcony railings blend nature's lights and shadows to the rounded and somewhat irregular concrete facades. The buildings connect with terraced bridges to nowhere and vertical blank walls. (Timchenko envisioned them dripping with greenery.)

## The Gardens

The parabolic shaped garden most open to the water is framed by Watergate West and the hotel. The largest and most enclosed garden in the middle is framed by the convex Watergate South and the concave Watergate East and hotel/office building. The third garden is the most secluded, although open to the river. A nearly circular green lawn is framed by the horseshoe shaped side of Watergate South.

Using hedges, flowering trees and grassy areas, the garden views are as appealing for those strolling at ground level as for as those looking down from roof terraces, balconies and their connecting bridges to nowhere. Clusters of varying tree species whose foliage provides a year-round changing landscape are the focus for the open spaces intermingled with formal flower beds and colorful flowers. Landscaping does not stop at flowers and trees.

Fountains with water cascading from one to the other provide the formal entry into the complex. The gentle sounds of water flowing between the fountains adds to the calming oasis effect intended by Moretti. The formal gardens nearest the buildings gradually and gently move from the constructed beds becoming more informal as they slope toward the natural landscape of the parkway.



Careful attention is being given to the landscaping at Watergate.