

The Tree of Life

Rising above the banks of the Guadalupe River, the Tree of Life is an emblem of hope and memory. Centered around a centuries-old sequoia that exemplifies California's oldest living beings, the Tree brings the deep time of the Bay Area into the present. Lifted up on construction elements that we usually use to make freeways, the Tree centers a forest of green rising up on ramps and platforms as both a human-made answer to the Coastal Ranges and a celebration of life. Across the River, this complex faces the Memory Mound, a buried, but light-filled site of remembrance.

Bringing together the majesty of California's natural setting with the sublime, but more troubling beauty of its infrastructure, the Tree of Life erects a new Eden on the fragments or ruins of a freeway. The massive concrete elements, if possible, to be reused from existing sites, frame an open landscape of plazas, fields, and pools that continue the natural spaces of the Guadalupe River Park up above the city. This democratic version of the Gardens of Babylon rises to eventually rival the height of the downtown office structures while answering to the bulk of the adjacent arena.

Monumental, and yet inviting and open, this vertical park revolves around a single sequoia tree. Meant both as a representative of California's nature and a reminder of the fruit tree that stood in the middle of the Garden of Eden (and thus of the orchards that once covered this site), the Tree of Life is the equivalent of the human—made beacons of aials, antennas, and observation towers.

A variety of small restaurants, bars, and coffee shops can be dotted throughout the generous meadows, offering refreshment and places from which to contemplate both far and near views. All spaces are reached by ramps, "stramps," or elevators, and are designed to be not only accessible, but welcoming to all. This inhabitable monument is both a place of pleasure and a celebration of California and San Jose.

Across the river, a place of memorial shelters below the berms of the Park. A field of columns answers to those of the Tree of Life complex, but also lets light into the underground space. There, a refined version of Colma's burial fields brings the deeds of those notable citizens who helped create today's San Jose back to light, while providing a cool place of contemplation and shade.