



René Bihan, managing principal of landscape architecture firm SWA Group, stands on the Terry Francois Boulevard side of the Golden State Warriors' Chase Center arena. SWA was the landscape architect for the Mission Bay project.

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While Golden State Warriors fans are interested in the action inside the new Chase Center arena, [René Bihan](#) has an outward view.

As a landscape architect, urban designer and managing principal at SWA Group, Bihan played a pivotal role in the “super block” that holds Chase Center and two office buildings for Uber. That includes the foliage along Third Street – hopefully designed (but painfully unprophetic this year) to turn Warriors blue and yellow during the NBA playoffs. The work also includes the planters and walkways in the plaza in front of the arena and the platform above Terry Francois Boulevard and the bay.

We talked to Bihan about the project and Warriors co-owner Peter Guber's botanical game.

SWA was involved when the Warriors planned to build at Piers 30/32. How did the new site change your plans? When they moved, we were involved in coming up with the vision, again, of the place. You have to think of it

topographically: Half of that stadium is below street level, so how do we connect all of the edges to Mission Bay?

You mean the “edges” of the parcel? There’s the physical kind of practicality to that, but there’s also an emotional experience of leaving Third Street, going into a plaza and then going into the arena itself.

Is this a part of San Francisco or just an alien spaceship dropped into Mission Bay? I think it looks simple, and that’s usually a sign that it wasn’t simple. (For example) the drum is over here, there’s about 150 feet to the street edge and then another 150 feet to the corner and, in order to make that grading work so that water flows away from the arena and you could approach from Third up to the stadium, there was only a quarter-inch of play. It looks like the kind of work you do with a pick and a shovel, but it’s not – it’s a scalpel in this case.

How do you use that scalpel? The stadium was really designed to feel like a walk in the park. From the corner of Third and One Warriors Way you can go up a sloped walkway and the path narrows and the garden edge comes in. It’s about building a kind of threshold that you go in and then you’re in the plaza – game on – and you’re off the street and into Chase Center.

And then there’s the approach from Terry Francois Boulevard. How is that different? There’s a stairway, you go up and there’s a garden terrace, you take a pause and look at the view. You go to the next terrace and it’s a different view. And when you get to the top, I think it’s a really beautiful moment, where you see the whole edge of the arena come down to the street, but you also see San Francisco’s working shipyard kind of come together with it.

And you’re taking a piece of all of those views? There are subtle differences. The Third Street plaza and terraces ... have a yellow and a blue color palette to them as they represent the Warriors. As you go to the back, to the upper terraces, it’s a darker palette, and the plant materials we’re using there are the plants that you see across the bay in the hills. As those grasses go brown in the hills in the summertime, the grasses on the site are going to go brown.

You were involved with planning early on, but the work of putting stuff in the ground is near the end. How does everyone play nicely to get this all to work seamlessly, at least to us outsiders? The direct answer is the fear of failure when you have two powerful owners. Seriously, no one wants to go up to those guys and say, “Sorry.”

But we did have a little of an edge in that Peter Guber is a gardening enthusiast. He supposedly has a beautiful garden. He knows the Latin names of the plants. He knows a lot of – you know, “I don’t want to use that assiduous one,” or “Ginkgos, they’ve got nice color, yeah, but I don’t like the fruit.” He really knows his plants. It’s very impressive. So the fact that he was able to talk about it was an important factor.

Take a look at the now-completed Chase Center

The Samsung scoreboard in the Golden State Warriors’ Chase Center arena in San Francisco is about four times larger than the main scoreboard at Oracle Arena in Oakland, the team’s former home, and is the largest LED display surface in the NBA.




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