

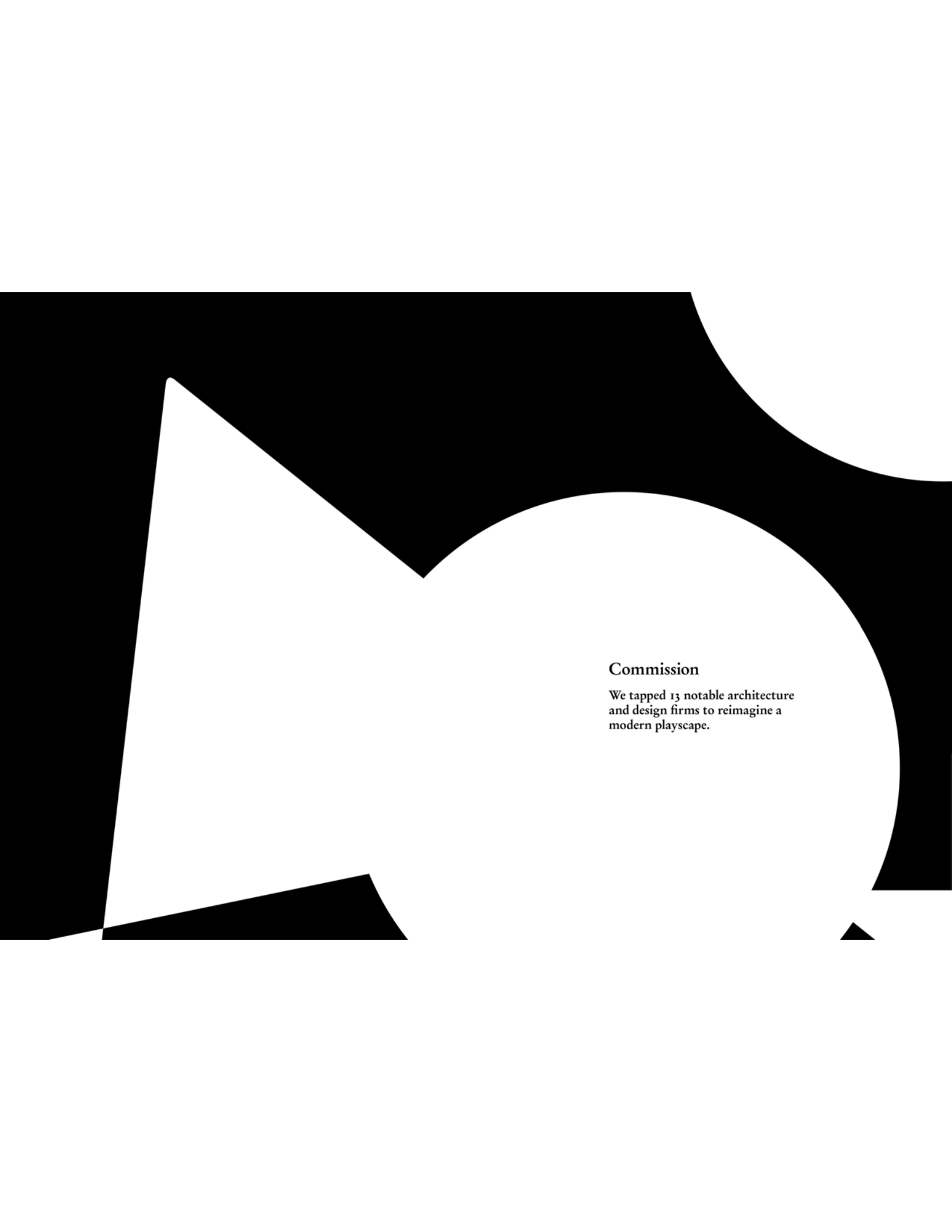
BJARKE INGELS

SURFACE

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THE DESIGN ISSUE





Commission

We tapped 13 notable architecture and design firms to reimagine a modern playscape.

COMMISSION

(OPPOSITE) Isamu Noguchi with Slide Mantra, in 1986.

There's a black-and-white photo, taken in 1986, of the Japanese American artist and designer Isamu Noguchi at the then rather stuffy Venice Biennial. In it, he stands confidently atop his spiraling "Slide Mantra," a Carrara marble sculpture that rests on a bed of wood chips in front of the U.S. Pavilion. Though he looks content and somewhat nonchalant, the message Noguchi was sending to the art world at the time — if not to the world at large — was clear: Come play! (And, while you're at it, stop taking yourselves so seriously!) One of the last major works in his six-decade-long career, the sculpture has endured in the 30-plus years since its creation. In 1991, it was installed in Miami's Bayfront Park. A couple of years ago, I saw several kids giddily going up and down it in circles, with no sense of time nor care in the world, lost in the action of play. I imagined the tens of thousands of children (and adults) who must have experienced that slide there over the years. When play and good design converge, as with "Slide Mantra," the outcome can be groundbreaking and, for many, life-changing.

For this feature, *Surface* tasked 13 designers and architects with the lofty goal of celebrating play in the 21st century by reimagining the playground for 2018 and beyond. The brief I sent to them all was rather straightforward, albeit maybe not so simple: "Create an object for a playground

of the future. It could be whatever you want it to be — as long as it's about play and makes sense within a playground setting." For reference points, I sent them two strong examples to consider: Noguchi's "Slide Mantra," as well as "Imagination Playground," a system developed a few years ago by the architect and designer David Rockwell with the aim to encourage unstructured "free play" at schools, parks, hospitals, and the like.

A broad array of ideas resulted, some of them admittedly more realizable than others. They range from, yes, another clever slide sculpture (by Paul Cockledge), to a fountain and water balloon-filling station hybrid (by Frederick McSwain), to a hide-and-seek-inspired teahouse (by Stephanie Goto). In one case (Studio Dror's), the designer collaborated with kids themselves to come up with the creations — musical chairs, literally. If there's anything that ties these projects together, it's the idea of the multifunctional — that good, sound playground design needs to be something that's fluid and can be experienced in many different ways, from various angles, with no one-size-fits-all model. These are ideas, I'm confident, that would enliven Miami's Bayfront Park — or most any public green. And in the cases of a few of them, I could even see them making a nice addition to the next Venice Biennial. >

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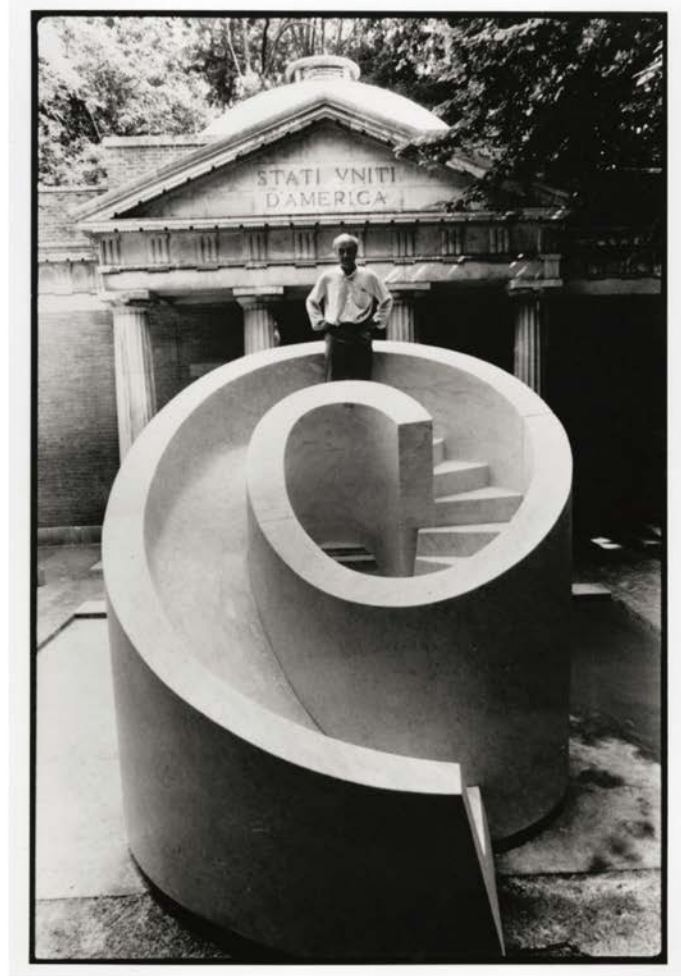


PHOTO: COURTESY THE ISAMU NOGUCHI FOUNDATION AND GARDEN MUSEUM, NEW YORK/ANS



OSCILLATE SLIDE
PAUL COCKSEGE

"Childhood memories of the joy of sliding, and the freedom of that movement, were the inspiration for this piece that celebrates infinite motion. The sculptural form of the Oscillate slide defines the park's playing area, encircling trees, picnic areas, and places to gather. People can walk in and out beneath the arches, as well as slide down the top. We hope this piece offers a return to the playground's original purpose as a place for us all to run, have fun, and be free—in the absence of electrical noise."

Rendering done in collaboration with the London-based 3-D architectural visualization studio VMAVI.



KIZOMBORI
JONATHAN TRAYTE

"This sculptural playwork garden combines an assortment of bizarre and surreal apparatuses installed in a rich environment of shrubs and trees. The devices have ambiguous function, and children are encouraged to interact independently, interpreting their own methods of play. Using casts and renderings of huge vegetables and contrasting textures, this [seemingly] edible landscape manipulates scale and form for hallucinatory effect."



CLAYGROUND
STUDIO TOOGOOD

"Toogood's design gives physical form to the concept of playfulness. Its chunky, ludic shapes—originally developed as clay maquettes—resemble the forms that children make as if by instinct when using plasticine: long sausages, doughnut rings, rounded eggs, and so on. The simple, art brut sculptures were tailored to accommodate the practicalities of play, reflecting the flights of imagination by which a child's mind can transform the most ordinary object into something magical. Scaled up, these familiar forms lend

a cartoon wonderland feel to the playground, transforming it into an inviting presence with which children can interact. In a friendly, ice-cream palette of strawberry, vanilla, and chocolate, the four pieces—a wiggly climbing frame, an archway swing, a ring-shaped seesaw, and a helter-skelter orbiting an egg—can be realized either in durable steel-framed fiberglass to facilitate off-site construction, or as painted concrete structures to allow for a more permanent installation."

Bailey, Spencer. "Commission: States of Play," *Surface Magazine*, May/June 2018.

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