

Featuring poetic swaths of indigenous plants, the new 42-acre park accompanying Athens's Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center brings inspiring and much-needed green space to the Greek capital. For details see Sources.

A NEW EDEN

FOR THE STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION IN ATHENS, GREECE, ARCHITECT RENZO PIANO AND LANDSCAPE DESIGNER DEBORAH NEVINS CONJURE A CULTURAL—AND HORTICULTURAL—PARADISE OUT OF A FORMER PARKING LOT



The park's stately gridded section slopes gently up toward the green roof and open pavilion at the far end.

BEFORE

The news out of Greece has not exactly been cheery the past few years, with the economic and refugee crises dominating the headlines. So hopes are high that Athens's recently completed Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC) will provide a morale boost not only for the city but for the country as a whole.

The \$854 million SNFCC complex was developed and built by the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, which administers the fortune of the late shipping magnate. Situated in the historic coastal neighborhood of Kallithea—on what had been a parking lot for the 2004 Olympic Games—the center was designed by the Renzo Piano Building Workshop to house the Greek National Opera and the National Library of Greece, and it includes a 42-acre park by the New York landscape design firm Deborah Nevins & Associates.

Both institutions—the opera house, with its two concert halls (a 1,400-seat auditorium and a 400-seat experimental space), and the library, which has a state-of-the-art media lab and can hold two million books—are contained in a single glass-and-concrete building, with separate entrances off a central plaza called the agora, a reference to the ancient Greek public square. Much of the complex is blanketed by a sloping green roof—seamlessly connected to the park—that reaches a height of nearly 100 feet, a feature conceived to restore the site's view of the sea, which had been obscured by construction over the decades. Atop this hill-like rise, an open pavilion offers a place for events, quiet contemplation, or simply admiring the 360-degree view, which includes the Acropolis. The structure is crowned by a 108,000-square-foot canopy covered with photovoltaic cells that generate electricity for the development (which is expected to receive LEED Platinum certification). As Giorgio Bianchi, the partner in charge

of the project for Piano's office, puts it, "The park and the buildings overlap, and it becomes one unique experience."

Nevins's scheme for the park—a welcome addition to a city that has a dearth of public green space—comprises about 1,500 trees and 320,000 smaller plants. An important goal, the landscape designer says, was to make the property "speak Greek." Nevins cultivated allées of olive trees and groves of pines and planted almond, fig, and pomegranate trees as well as arbutus and native oaks. For the park's Mediterranean Garden, she chose drought-resistant shrubs like *Sarcopoterium* and perennials like Phlomis and Coronilla, and tried to use as many indigenous plants as possible to foster a landscape that is both sustainable and culturally resonant. The park also features a pool with a fountain, playgrounds, athletic facilities, and a Great Lawn that can host events such as films and concerts. One of the banks of a tree-lined canal is distinguished by tiered

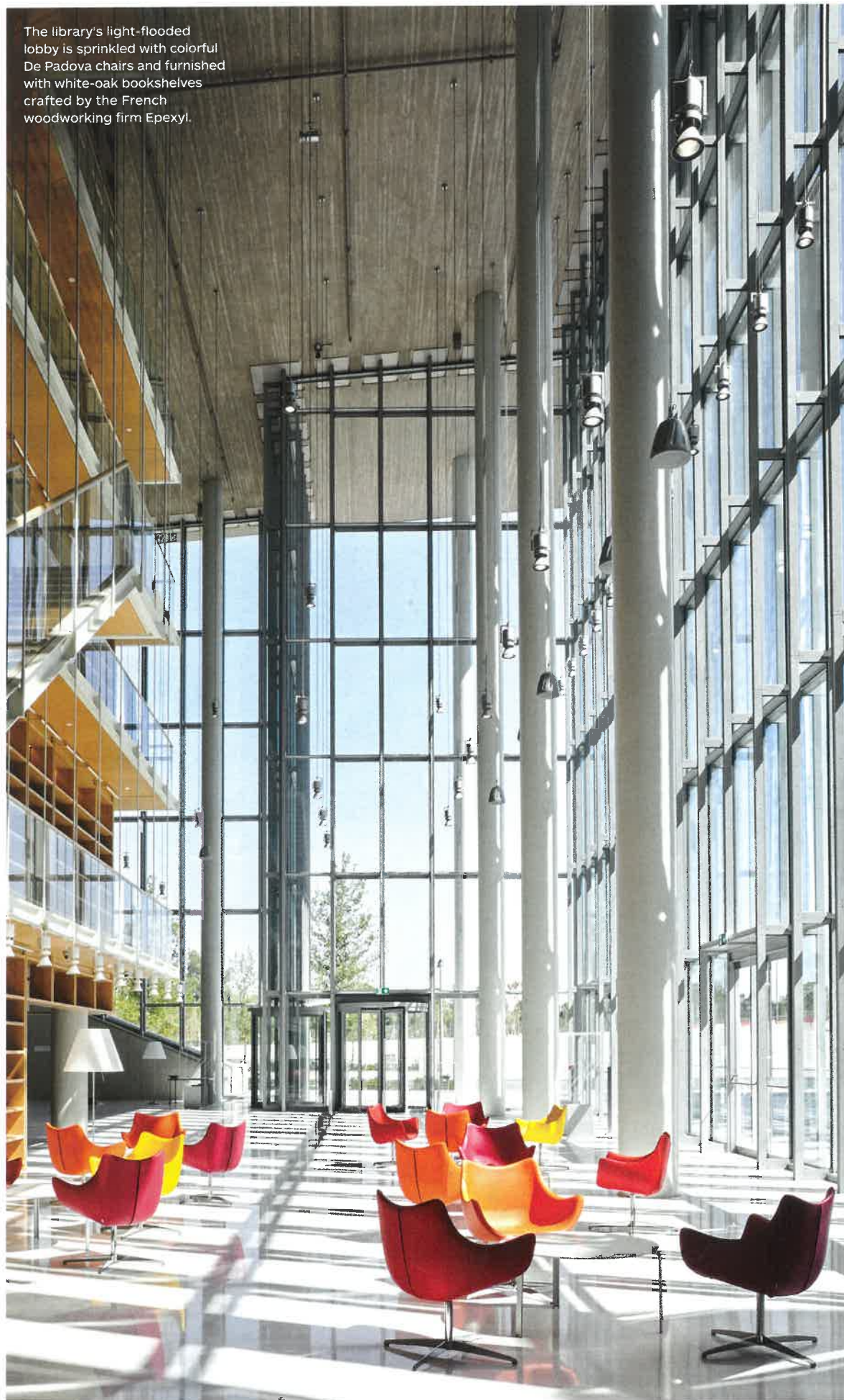
concrete seating, creating what the designer calls "an active outdoor space." But her favorite part is the green roof. "I wanted it to capture my experience of Greek hillsides," Nevins says, so she planted it with native grasses.

The Niarchos Foundation, which is receiving this year's Hadrian Award from the World Monuments Fund in recognition of its 20-year history of sponsoring preservation projects, plans to hand over the cultural center to the Greek state by early next year. And while neither the library nor the opera house will be fully functional for several more months, the park is already drawing substantial numbers of visitors, both locals and tourists. "I actually think it's going to change Athens; it's that big," says Elly Andriopoulou, a grant manager for the foundation. Dimitris Protopsaltou, the cultural center's chief executive officer, goes a step further, adding, "It will change Greece, not just Athens. People will know Greece from the SNFCC." □

Crowned by an elegant canopy that holds solar panels, the pavilion features a glass-walled catwalk and an expansive public terrace offering sweeping vistas.

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The library's light-flooded lobby is sprinkled with colorful De Padova chairs and furnished with white-oak bookshelves crafted by the French woodworking firm Epexyl.



From the pavilion's lookout, visitors can take in a view that includes the Acropolis and Mount Lycabettus.



Plane trees line the site's quarter-mile-long canal; a flight of stairs links the promenade to the library's green roof.

In the Mediterranean Garden, sculpted beds of partridge feather, curry plant, german-der, and Euphorbia thrive amid olive and cypress trees.

