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LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE MAGAZINE

THE MAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN
SOCIETY OF LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

PIER TO PIER

MVVA's epic Brooklyn Bridge Park

DESIGN ON WHEELS

Resilience outreach around the Bay

INVENTIVE PAVERS

Makers build it better

NATIVE BEES

A photographer goes viral



A COMPLEX CROSSROADS

IN LOS ANGELES, A REGENERATIVE ART INSTALLATION
 CLEANS STORMWATER RUNOFF.

BY WENDY GILMARTIN

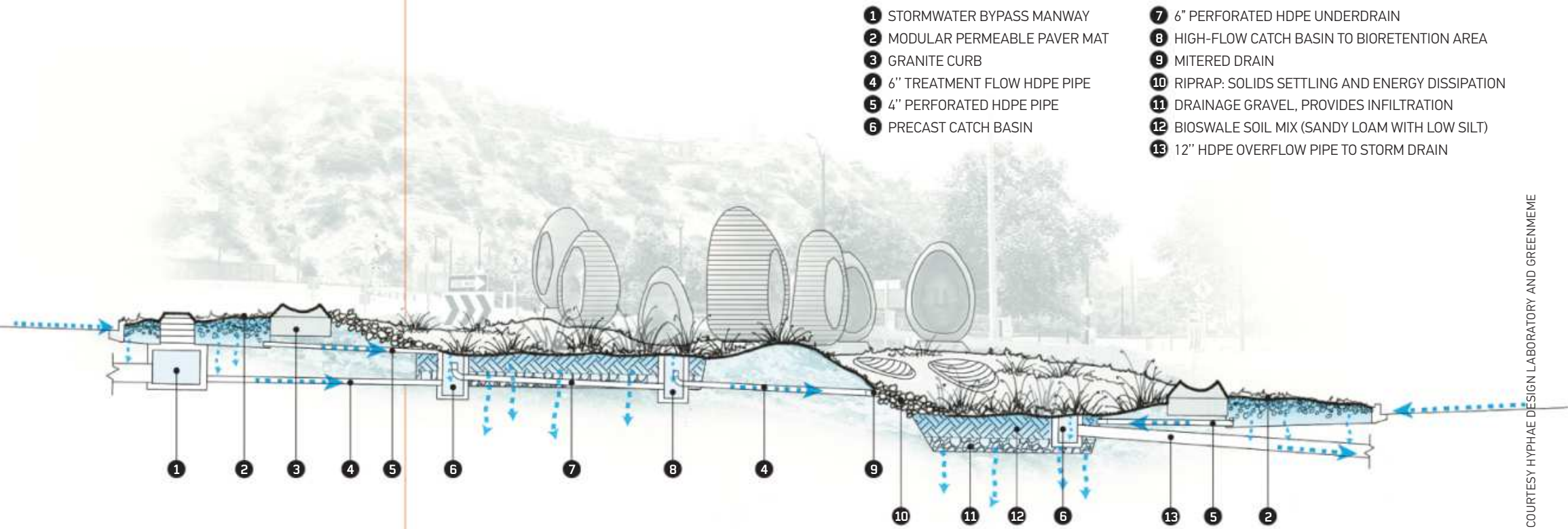
When the artists Freyja Bardell and Brian Howe installed their guerrilla-style *River Liver* sculpture series in the Los Angeles River 10 years ago, they had no idea it would lead to a paradigm shift in top-down Los Angeles City governance. The “livers”—bamboo rafts carrying plant massings, chains of regenerative plant pods, and stacks of mini-habitats piled up on the banks or hooked to the back of a paddleboat—would float, sink, or wash up ashore and, in the process, break down pollutants in the water. The project was convivial too, as many of the “livers” were constructed and maintained by neighborhood groups along the river.

With the “livers” project in mind, Bardell and Howe, who work under the studio name Greenmeme, submitted an entry to then-city councilman Ed Reyes’s call for a public art piece at a street and highway intersection where three neighborhoods—Elysian Valley, Cypress Park, and Glassell Park—come together. They considered their proposal a long shot. “We were huge underdogs for this project,” Howe says. But, Bardell adds, “We knew they’d been through a round of proposals already, and two had not happened. We wanted to propose a good strategy in the constraints they had.” Greenmeme’s approach offered interactive sculptures of residents’ faces in a mi-

crolandscape that also remediated stormwater runoff.

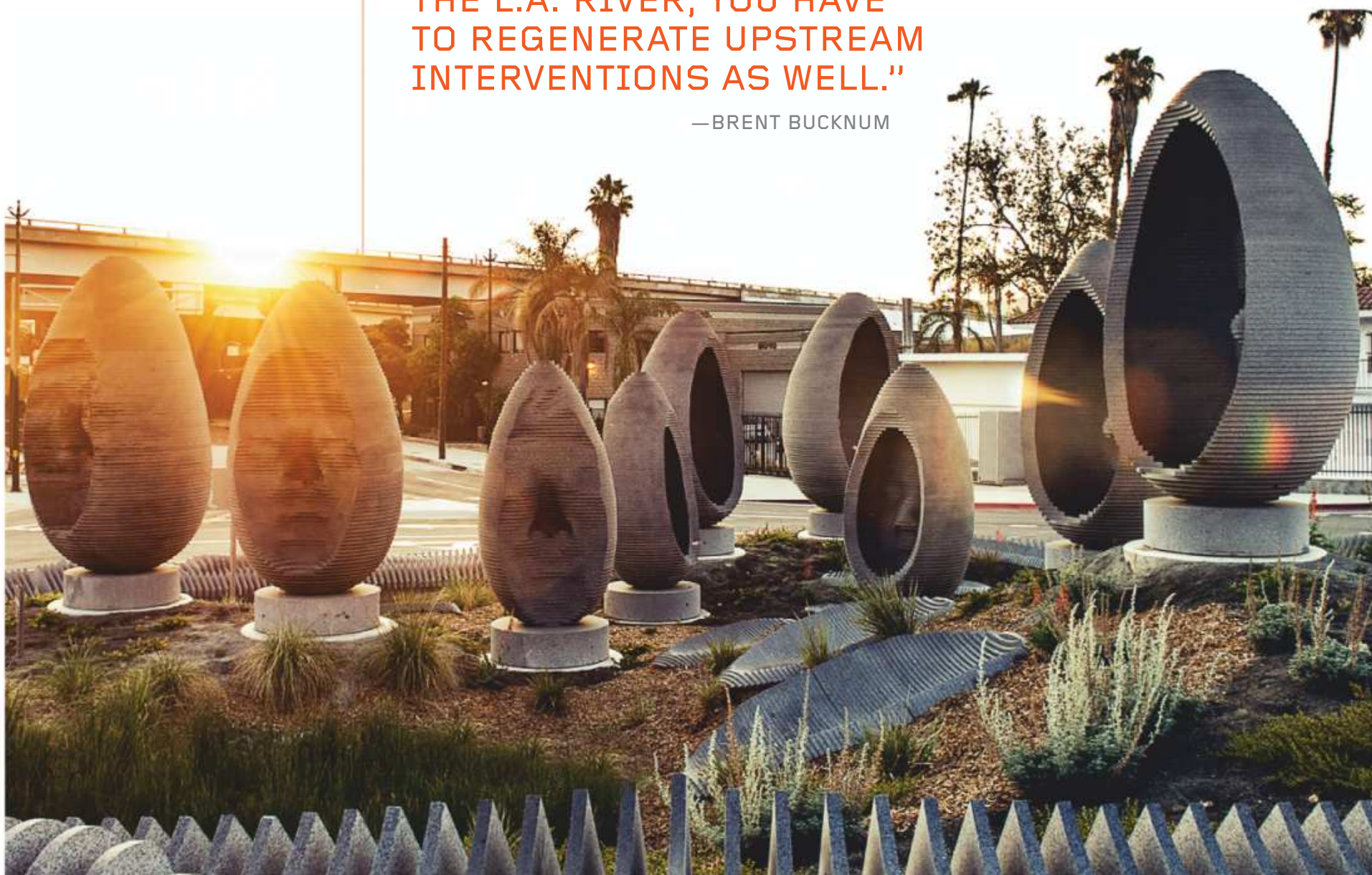
Now, 10 years later, their winning concept has been realized. A high-speed and highly trafficked hardscape, amid a web of bureaucratic oversight, is the venue for their precedent-setting art piece, *Faces of Elysian Valley*, which is as much about regenerative urban runoff strategies as it is about the interconnection of the neighborhoods it serves. The “faces” are 3-D scans of residents’ likenesses, collected by Bardell and Howe at neighborhood events. The sculptures are built from local granite that is water jet cut, sliced, and stacked into egg-shaped

BELOW
 The roundabout's "treatment train" conveys runoff from surrounding streets and bridges.



**"IF YOU WANT TO REVITALIZE
THE L.A. RIVER, YOU HAVE
TO REGENERATE UPSTREAM
INTERVENTIONS AS WELL."**

—BRENT BUCKNUM



BELOW

3-D scans of residents' faces are rendered in sliced and stacked granite, which stands like totems in the regenerative landscape.

totems, then fine-tuned to fit in the constraints of the street engineers' view corridor and impact regulations.

The site's complex, conflicting grade changes drove design decisions too, out of which the team developed a chain of bioswales—they call them a "treatment train"—to direct water into the roundabout. Whereas a concrete roundabout would have presented enormous runoff issues, Greenmeme's design, developed in collaboration with the ecologist and designer Brent Bucknum of Hyphae Design Laboratory in Oakland, California, conveys half the runoff from the overhead Riverside Bridge, as

well as surrounding streets, including busy thoroughfares such as Figueroa Street and San Fernando Road. Overflow is directed to the Los Angeles River. "If you want to revitalize the L.A. River, you have to regenerate upstream interventions as well," Bucknum says. "The roundabout does that."

Throughout eight years of design development, and coordinating with dozens of municipal agencies, the team managed to maintain the project's integrity, avoiding rounds of potentially catastrophic value engineering. Bucknum emphasizes the importance of drawings from which

the contractors make their bids and maintain control over specifications and construction details. "Strategizing drawing production is the only way to get good integrated systems," he says. "Getting that stuff into the details and specs is imperative."

"There are 30 different utilities running under the roundabout, so the project was like threading a needle," Bucknum adds. "That we got to do it *not* out of concrete is insane. That we are flooding it with two million gallons of water is insane. It's super progressive to approve a roundabout in the U.S. alone. That it got built is commendable to the city of L.A." ●

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ON THE COVER

A bus to Brooklyn Bridge Park. The park was designed by Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates, page 72.

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