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A PLAYGROUND

designed by David Rockwell has opened in lower Manhattan. More famous for designing luxury hotels and restaurants like Nobu, Rockwell found the difference wasn't as big as it sounds. "I have always been drawn to designing spaces where people interact and play, but as adults," he says.

The Imagination playground is a sculpted landscape of sand and water, but the real difference here is that there are lots of loose parts. There are large, blue foam building blocks, sandbags, buckets and shovels. And unlike most playgrounds this one has staff, so-called "play associates", to look after the movable parts.

"It's a very kid-centric place and it took five years of deep immersion into existing playground research to develop it," says Rockwell. "It's not just a

holding pen for kids, but a place where they can get creative."

A whopping \$7.4 million was spent on the project, but Rockwell didn't take a cent. "It was very much a self-initiated pro bono project that I approached the Department of Parks & Recreation with and they helped us find the site," says Rockwell, who is now looking to expand the concept

to other areas of New York.

It brings to mind another famous New York designer, Isamu Noguchi, who conceived quite a few playgrounds for the city in the 1940s and 50s, which were never built. They look like sensuous sculpture parks and oases of calm in comparison. I know which I would prefer, but then I'm not a kid.

JOHANNA AGERMAN ROSS



MARGIN: \$3 million of the budget was used to relocate a water main running under the plot, which was formerly a parking lot. IMAGE: © FRANK OUDERMAN 2010