



IT'S BEEN 10 YEARS SINCE NOTED ARCHITECT ALFRED CALDWELL died and if you Google his name, the project that comes up most often is his Lily Pool in Chicago's Lincoln Park. When he last saw it the place was a tangled mess of weeds, shrubs, and broken stones—a "dead world" he said. Today the recently designated national historic landmark has come back to life after a two-year restoration. CALDWELL, BEST KNOWN FOR HIS WORK AROUND CHICAGO, transformed the site from a dilapidated Victorian lily pond into a stunning Prairie-style "hidden garden," including a river, a limestone-edged lagoon, aquatic plants, and wildflowers. A WPA project, it was his baby—he even cashed in his life insurance to buy flowers for it. BUT ITS ZEN-LIKE BEAUTY STARTED TO FADE after only 10 years, when the park's zoo turned it into a sanctuary for exotic birds. The birds were not kind to the place, destroying plants and inducing erosion. Invasive trees took over—with the diminished sunlight killing more plant life—and a late '60s renovation paved over some of the site. SO THE CHICAGO PARK DISTRICT AND THE LINCOLN PARK CONSERVANCY had their work cut out for them with the restoration. One thing was clear: the public wanted to be involved. Focus groups of preservationists, birders, residents, and advocates for the Americans with Disabilities Act helped guide the comeback. CALDWELL, KNOWN FOR HIS UNCONVENTIONAL VIEWS, was often fired for one disagreement or another. But, as a protégé of landscape architect Jens Jensen—"father of the Chicago parks system"—he had broad support, and appeal. Mies van der Rohe became a lifelong friend after visiting the pool. "HE DID ALL OF HIS LANDSCAPING WITH A SOCIAL PURPOSE," says Lee Bey, executive director of the Chicago Central Area Committee. "He designed for the common man." Caldwell certainly succeeded with this site. "You open the doors and the city just falls away," Bey says. "You forget you are in Chicago."