EDITED BY TIMOTHY A. SCHULER



Two Countries, Many Futures

PRESERVATION

In the late 1990s, Rebecca Orozco, a history and anthropology professor at southern Arizona's Cochise College, became interested in a group of weathered adobe buildings less than half a mile north of the U.S.–Mexico border in the small town of Naco, Arizona. The buildings, called Camp Naco, had been a U.S. Army installation dating to the Mexican Revolution—one of three dozen outposts built to deal with conflict at the border. Yet the 200-person camp was unique in two ways: It was the only outpost still standing, and it had housed Buffalo Soldiers, segregated companies of African American personnel.

Over the next 20 years, Orozco sought funds to preserve the site while watching its structures gradually fall into disrepair. She convinced a local municipal government to acquire the site and created a nonprofit, the Naco Heritage Alliance, to administer it. With the help of Helen Erickson, ASLA, a professor of landscape architecture at the University of Arizona, Camp Naco was included on the 2022 National Trust for Historic Preservation's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list, and the alliance received $8.1 million from the State of Arizona and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

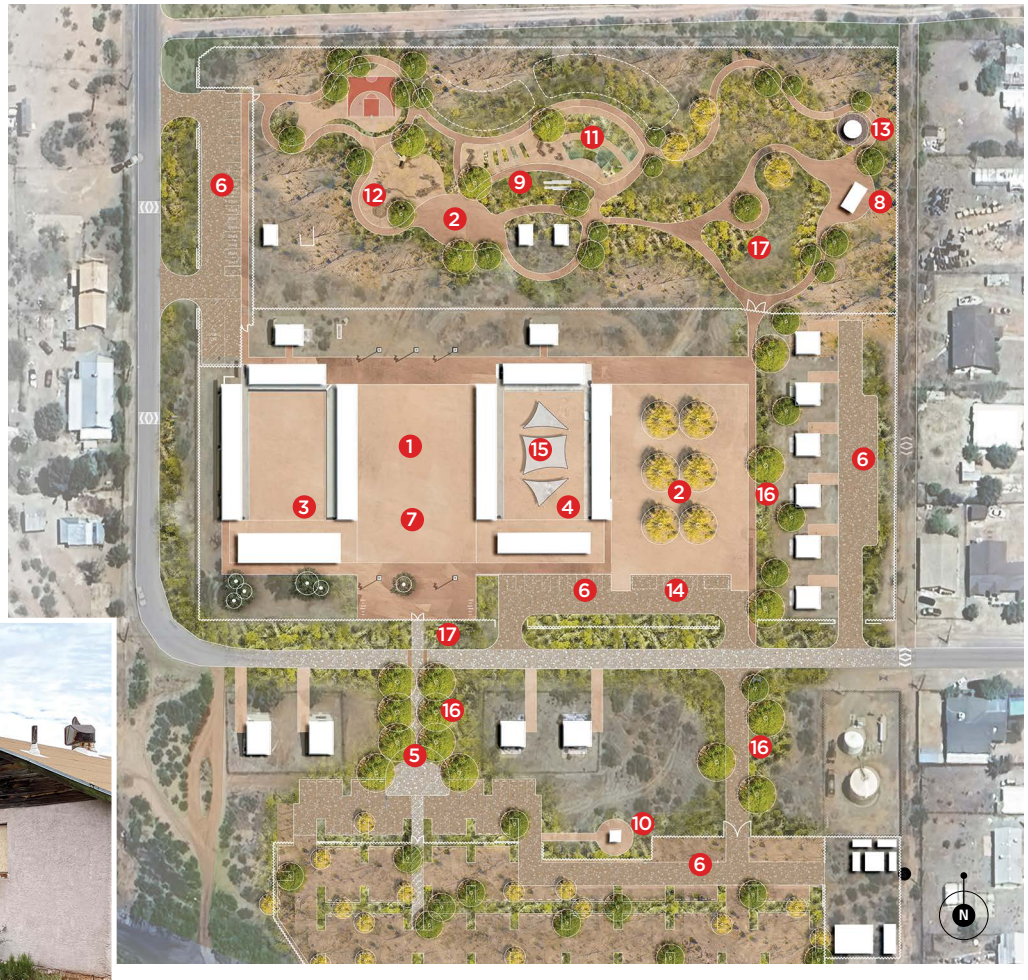
The Naco Heritage Alliance hired Poster Mirto McDonald, Wilder Landscape Architects, and SALT Landscape Architects to develop a master plan for the 17-acre site. It was important that the camp be not only a museum, but also a place that served the needs of the low-income, binational, local community. "Folks saw this as an opportunity

ABOVE
The buildings at Arizona's Camp Naco are poised to be restored in the first phase of a new master plan.

SALT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

LEGEND

1. Parade Grounds
2. Outdoor Picnic Area
3. Museum Quadrant
4. Performance Quadrant
5. Entry Plaza/Promenade
6. Permeable Driving Surface
7. Stabilized Surfacing
8. Outdoor Pavilion
9. Outdoor Learning Space
10. Historic Water Tower/Viewing Tower
11. Community Garden
12. Interactive Children's Play
13. Bird Observation Deck
14. Food Truck Stalls/Drop-Off Zone
15. Fabric Shade Structure
16. Buffer Planting
17. Habitat Planting





PRESERVATION

to make something that was far more than just backward-looking history," says Allen Compton, ASLA, of SALT. "How could it also be a catalyst for economic development? Cultural exchange across the border? All of a sudden, the complexity and opportunities and the vision just got really big."

The team found that the best way to accommodate the site's many possibilities was by limiting their interventions. Around the historic buildings, which are clustered near the center of the site, "[we're] not doing anything except providing for activation," says Jennifer Patton of Wilder Landscape Architects. In Phase 1, expected to open in 2026, a rock-filled geogrid will be installed at the site's main quadrangle, called the parade grounds, to provide an accessible and multipurpose surface for community events. The other quadrangles will be seeded with a mix of native grasses, and a new entry promenade will create a sense of arrival. Water catchment basins around the buildings will supply native shrubs, including catclaw mimosa and Mexican wolfberry.

A later phase will provide a more parklike experience in the field of mesquite shrub and cholla cactus north of the buildings, with winding trails, interpretive signage, and spaces for recreation, community gardens, and education about the site's many layers. "This site is unique in the number of different stories being told," Patton says. "It's conflicting groups who have conflicting histories, trying to come together in one place and tell all of those stories."

—CAROLINE TRACEY

ABOVE
The master plan preserves the orthogonal arrangement of the military buildings, repurposing the central quads as gathering spaces.

LEFT
In addition to the historic buildings, the site's history and ecology are part of the interpretive plan.

CAMP NACO DESIGN TEAM, TOP RIGHT: SALT LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS, BOTTOM LEFT