



**GRASSES** by Rick Darke

The High Line would be unrecognizable without its grasses. They contribute more to the essential character and dynamic qualities of its landscape than any other group of plants. Instead of brightly colored, broad-petaled flowers, the unique appeal of grasses is derived from texture, line, and form; sound, scent, and movement; and perhaps most of all, translucency. On the High Line, grasses are the matrix into which almost all else is set. Their soft texture and fine lines are perfect foils for architecture, furniture, and the comparatively coarse flowers, foliage, and seed heads of other plants. Grasses are the first to tell of every summer breeze. Their supple stalks flutter, bend, and bow, dancing to every storm, painting portraits of the wind. As they move they sing in tones ranging from a rustle to a low rattle. Their highly translucent flowers and foliage are readily set aglow by sunlight or moonlight, creating luminous displays that are especially dramatic when grasses are side lit or backlit. Scent isn't common among grasses, but when present it can be a delightful surprise. Few visitors fail to notice the unusual scent of prairie dropseed, *Sporobolus heterolepis*, which fills the late summer air on the High Line with a fragrance often likened to burnt buttered popcorn or crushed fresh cilantro.

