

Seattle Center Skate Plaza

Urban design, artistic glass, and sound construction integrate skateboarding in the public realm.

DESIGN TEAM

Landscape Architect van der Zalm + associates inc

Skatepark Designer New Line Skateparks Inc

Architect Weinstein AU

Artist Perri Lynch

General Contractor McLure and Sons

Mechanical Engineer/Electrical WSP Flack+Kurtz

Skatepark Contractor Grindline Skateparks

Structural Engineer KPFF Consulting Engineers

In a high profile location, with lofty expectations from an educated Seattle skateboarding community, van der Zalm + associates inc partnered with New Line Skateparks Inc to build the new Seattle Center Skate Plaza. Undergoing rigorous consultation with City officials and other interest groups, the project overcame extensive construction challenges to create a seamless space enjoyed by skaters and non-skaters alike.

Located in the middle of the Seattle Center Campus, bordering Thomas Street and 2nd Avenue, the 10,000 square foot skate plaza lays in the shadows of Seattle's iconic Space Needle. At a cost of \$1.5 million, the project will accommodate an anticipated 60,000 unique visits per year. The site formerly contained a pavilion from the 1962 Seattle World's Fair. Known as Pavilion A, the glass and concrete structure was carefully dismantled to allow for construction and to ensure that all mechanical and catering needs of the adjacent KeyArena were maintained throughout construction.

The Seattle City Council mandated construction of the Seattle Center Skate Park after a former skatepark on the Seattle Center Campus was sold to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for development of its world headquarters. The project was funded by proceeds of the sale and other City capital funds. van der Zalm + associates inc was retained as the prime consultant for the overall project, with New Line Skateparks Inc hired for the skatepark design.

The team, with acclaimed international experi-



ence, approaches each project with a common question, "How do we create the next generation of skateboarders where they do not have to be segregated into separate spaces?," says Kyle Dion, owner of New Line Skateparks Inc. In a design profession that is often instructed to implement skateboard deterrents, this way of thinking is challenging common assumptions of how to integrate skateparks in the public realm. Dion, the lead designer for the skate plaza, remarks on the well established skate spots in the world like Love Park in Philadelphia, Pier 7 in San Francisco, and the plazas in Barcelona, "Thinking back, all of those were just great civic spaces, places designed with people in mind that skaters gravitated towards".

Mark van der Zalm, principal van der Zalm + associates inc, elaborates, "The success of these famed public spaces has shaped our ▶



[1] The skate plaza features a 3.5m high skateable glass panel

[2] Young skater on opening day

Images: Greg Shisman

approach to site planning and integrated design. Our goals include blurring the edges of designated 'play space' and urban plaza space". This has proven successful in the highly urbanized environments of San Francisco, Winnipeg, Austin, and Umea, Sweden. The creation of safe edges for spectators, parents, and users creates a vibrant environment and ultimately leads to the success of the space. The team designs each project as a public plaza first and then makes modifications to evolve the design into a fully skateable space.

At Seattle Center, the skatepark is designed as a flowing street-like plaza where non-skaters can watch users challenge modern skate elements such as stairs, ledges, and transitions, which accommodate skaters of all skill levels. By skatepark standards, the park is small, which demanded innovation in the design of its terrain. Handling 50-60 skaters at a time, it combines street and bowl-style skate elements to challenge a mix of users.

In a city known for its glass artistry, the focal point of the park is a 3.5m high skateable glass panel, believed to be the first of its kind. Local artist Perri Lynch designed architectural glass panels that border the Thomas Avenue portion of the site, serving as both visual and acoustic barriers to an adjacent church and main pedestrian corridor. The panels display images derived from decks of used skateboards and add an aesthetically defining element to the site while embracing skateboard culture.

Lightweight styrofoam voiding was installed to meet load-bearing requirements. Though voiding is a common element in landscape construction, and has been used in skateparks before, the intricacy of the design required skatepark contractor Grindline Skateparks to shape the foam by hand, inventing new tools and techniques as they went. This engineering challenge, combined with the design team's directive to create a multi-purpose space, and extensive public consultation has resulted in its most challenging project to date.

Seattle Center Skate Plaza demonstrates that great civic spaces can accommodate skateboarding in a way that is enjoyable to everyone. By designing the space for non-skaters first, the plaza attracts a diverse demographic and is enjoyable even to non-skaters. **51**

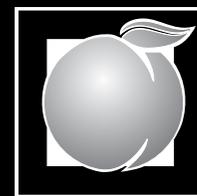


[3] Glass panels behind display imagery adapted from used skateboard decks
Image: Seattle Center courtesy of Chuck Tuck

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