

etnies Skatepark of Lake Forest

Stephen Kelly, Editor



Photo by Guy Nelson

Lake Forest, Calif., pop. 78,000, packs 6,274 people per square mile into this most densely populated city in south Orange County. Incorporated in Dec. 1991, the city has expanded to encompass the communities of Foothill Ranch and Portola Hills.

The "Lake" in the city name is really two artificial lakes around which are built custom homes and condos. The forest part is what is left over of 400 acres of eucalyptus trees planted in the 1900s by a landowner for a lumber operation.



Historic photo—Sat. Dec. 13, 2003, grand opening of the free public etnies Skatepark, Lake Forest, Calif., south Orange County. The city spearheaded the park. SITE Design Group of Solana Beach, Calif. designed the skate surfaces, California Skateparks of Ontario, Calif. constructed it and the Rabben/Herman Design Office of Newport

Beach provided the landscape architecture. The major financial sponsor of the skate park, etnies, manufactures skateboard shoes and clothing.

Photo courtesy of Rabben/Herman Design Office

The Birth of a Skate Park

Based on citywide recreation surveys by Lake Forest, residents indicated a skate park was the top recreation priority. Just about everywhere you go in Southern California you'll see kids on skateboards, often on the sidewalks, or at office parks or just about any hard surface. These spaces often prohibit skateboarding, and so it's important they have a place to go, to practice their skills, have fun and just hang out.

To design and construct the skate park, the city created a public-private partnership with etnies, a manufacturer of skateboard shoes and clothing that had recently relocated to Lake Forest. The city leadership and etnies saw the project as an ideal opportunity to fulfill this popular recreation need.



A DG path runs from the boulevard through the buffer slope and climbs the hill past the amphitheater and to the skate park entry.

Photo by Guy Nelson

The Site

The space, a remnant, is nestled between an elevated toll road, Serrano Creek and an equestrian/hiking trail. The site is also bordered by the busy thoroughfare of Lake Forest Boulevard.



The skate park offers a large “street” area (stairs, ramps, flat bars, handrails, banks, ledges, rolls, flow bowls, T-bowl and “peanut pool” (shallower, less steep bowl). The majority of skateboarders ride the street stuff, which is a plus for those who ride the bowls. LASN watched an “elder,” perhaps early 40s, skating a bowl. It’s fast, furious and physical and he soon came up the lip for a rest.

Photo by Guy Nelson

Aim

For etnies the intent was a signature, quality skating surface that would also be a venue for national skating events the company would sponsor.

The city of Lake Forest, of course, wanted this effort to reflect the pride it has in the community. The city was thrilled to bring this amenity to local residents and the broader Orange County community. The day LASN visited the park, we spoke with an “elder” skateboarder, perhaps 19 or 20, who was down from Los Angeles for the day with a few friends. That LA teens would make a two plus hour round-trip to etnies indicates the skate park is recognized as something special.



Although the skate park is just off busy Lake Forest Boulevard, people cannot see the skaters from the street because of the site grading elevations. The roadside sloped planting buffer are bands of phormium ('Jack Spratt'), red fescue and some Manzanita shrubs. The existing eucalyptus street trees ('Red Iron Bark') are continued at the

bottom of the slope.
Photo by Guy Nelson

The city was as concerned over the design of the surrounding landscape as they were of the concrete undulations. An added element in the mix was the city held an easement over a portion of the adjacent regional equestrian/hiking trail and maintenance access to Serrano Creek.



From busy Lake Forest Blvd. the five 24-foot-tall light columns create an unmistakable identity for the skate park. The light columns, fabricated from 30-inch diameter perforated pipe, have interior illumination via two 400-watt uplights, projecting bright light sparkles. Edge-lit plastic caps the columns for a glowing effect.

Photo courtesy of Rabben/Herman Design Office

Role of the Landscape Architect

The landscape architecture firm of Rabben/Herman Design Office of Newport Beach got the assignment as the lead consultant for the project, responsible for managing the team of architects, skate park designers and civil engineers.

The landscape architects developed the master plan for the park and overall concept for integrating the skating surfaces and the exterior park into a unified design. The landscape architects also prepared the bidding documents for the site grading, hardscape, planting design, irrigation and signage. To assure a successful design and implementation, the landscape architects also led the public meetings and negotiations with Friends of the Serrano Creek, Orange County Harbor Beaches and Parks and the Orange County Drainage District.



Photo by Guy Nelson



The landscape architecture design for the man-made park elements is inspired by the fluid back-and-forth motions of the experienced skateboarder on a flow course. The overlapping corrugated metal shade trellises and roof of the restroom/office building reflect this movement. The arc of the structures curves from right to left and then right again, terminating in the walls of the amphitheater.

Photo courtesy of Rabben/Herman Design Office

With etnies focused on the skate park elements, the SITE Design Group of Solana Beach, Calif. put its expertise to work to design the skate terrain and California Skateparks of Ontario, Calif. brought its experience to constructing the bowls and free-flow skating terrains.

The challenges for the landscape architects was to integrate landscaping with hardscape elements, create an entry, fit in parking, design a drop off area, position seating areas for large skate board competition/events and make a landscape transition from the park proper to the trail area. The landscape architects had to build a focused identity for the park to reflect the enthusiasm and spirit of youthful athleticism in its materials and look.



Corrugated and galvanized metals, and Corten steel, were two of the primary materials. The Corten steel panels are punched and sandwiched with red acrylic plastic. The panels glow during sunsets and are backlit at night. The panels act as screen walls at the entrance to the restroom facility and in the perimeter fence surrounding the skate park.

Photo by Guy Nelson

Special Considerations

The landscape architects find the overall design “blurred the lines between the skating surface and the surrounding park.” The skating surface features three distinct but integrated areas: the bowls, the flow course and the street course. The forms of the bowl course flow outward to the amphitheater while the geometry of the street course affects the walks, grading and overlooks adjacent to it.

The design of the park incorporates traditional materials including corrugated metal pipe, Corten steel, red acrylic panels and metal mesh in unusual ways to create a unique look.

A series of design decisions were introduced to discourage skaters from using areas other than the intended skating surfaces. The plaza hardscape is imprinted asphalt surfaces in a variety of patterns, including elevated, knobby circles and etched linings. This area is a 360 loop for parents to drop off skaters. A center section, which blocks vehicles with perimeter bollards, has pavers, slightly spaced. And wouldn't you know it, despite these rough, nonskate wheel-friendly plaza surfacings, when LASN was on site taking a closer look at the plaza hardscape, a skateboarder bumped over the pavers to talk with us.





LASN dropped by etnies on a weekday afternoon just after school to catch the action. Pre-teens, teenagers and a few less spry skateboarders showed off for LASN photographer/graphic artist Guy Nelson.

Photos by Guy Nelson

The paths throughout the park are decomposed granite walkways, another inconvenient surface for skateboards. For the same reason the concrete seat walls are set in turf. It's not hard to visualize skateboarders "grinding" on the seat walls.

Fortunately, there's plenty of grinding edges in the skate courses and bowls.

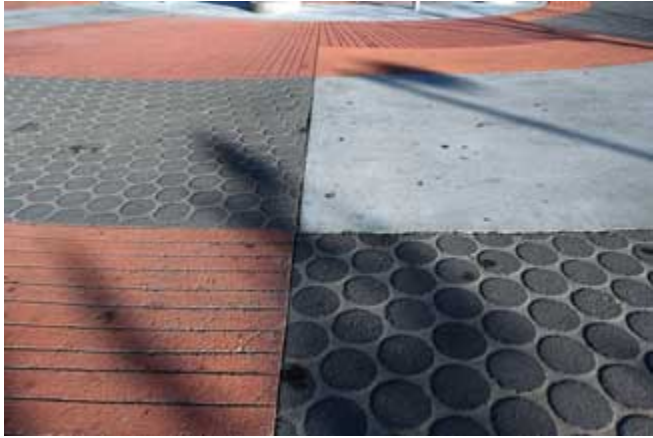


The close proximity of a regional equestrian/hiking trail gives those in the surrounding Lake Forest neighborhood pedestrian access to the skate park. The trail also affords maintenance access to the retention basin, relocated to the edge of the channel and separated from the skate park by a six-foot tall berm. Native oaks and sycamores are plentiful along the trail. Sage, octopus agave, island snapdragon, coyote bush, Calif. poppy, blue bedder and coffeeberry are just some of the shrubs. above, right: Equal emphasis was given to the landscape and amenities outside the skating area. Honey locust and Calif. sycamore trees, picnic tables, bike racks and benches form a little niche adjacent to the drop-off area.

Photos courtesy of Rabben/Herman Design Office

The equestrian/hiking trail was integrated into the design but visually separated from the more active recreational by a berm and native plantings.

Grades alignments, widths and location of trees were coordinated with the drainage district to allow maintenance equipment access for the Serrano Creek channel. The design intent here was visually separating the trail from the more intensive uses of the skate park, but with a natural appearance, rather than an engineered one.



The plaza is a roundabout dropoff for parents, mostly in SUVs. The hardscape combines imprinted asphalt surfaces

in a variety of patterns, including elevated, knobby circles to mimic skate wheels, concrete and pavers. The knobs and etching are meant to discourage skateboard use. The day LASN was there, a skateboarder bumped over the central pavers to speak with us. The custom corrugated metal pipe columns with light bases are giant agave planters, perhaps inspired by *Guilliver's voyage to Brobdingnag*. Bollards protect the center area and also line the sidewalk.

Photos by Guy Nelson



You get a great view of the bowl areas from the amphitheater, whether sitting on the grass (Marathon Ile, a seed mix) or lounging on the seat walls. The bay laurels are in bloom on the hill.

Skate park designer

SITE Design Group,
Solana Beach, Calif.

Skate park builder

California Skateparks, Ontario, Calif.

Landscape Architecture

Rabben/Herman Design Office, Newport Beach, Calif.

Principals

William Rabben, Daniel Herman,
Tom Skinfill