

Long Beach Airport Terminal Improvements

Long Beach, CA

Long Beach Airport is a prominent civic gateway for thousands of travelers. Recent upgrades to the historic terminal integrate open-air spaces that offer respite from the hectic, and often stressful, experience of modern air travel. Through the design of these new landscape spaces, the landscape architect saw an opportunity to create a landscape experience that elevates public perception of the City's distinctive character and enhances its appeal as a transit hub.

Long Beach's unique geography, climate and cultural heritage were inspiration for the landscape design. The City is a coastal community with an identity strongly linked to its waterways. It is a city bounded on three sides by water: the Los Angeles River on the west, the San Gabriel River on the east, and the Pacific Ocean to the south. Bridges over rivers, esplanades along the strand and the piers of its bustling commercial port are celebrated civic elements.

The landscape is composed of two intersecting open-air concourses designed to evoke the character of coastal and riparian waterfront in Long Beach. The first concourse is oriented on an east-west axis that roughly parallels the City's south-facing coastline. It links the historic terminal building with the new waiting area concourse. An allee of California Fan Palms recalls the iconic skyline of coastal esplanades that run along the strand. Beneath the palms, undulant beds of Agaves abstract the color and movement of the sea. Wooden benches resemble palettes of stacked lumber, designed to remind travelers of the cargo transported at the City's coastal dockyards.

A soothing view garden, open to the sky, anchors the 'esplanade's' western terminus. Like Long Beach's two major rivers, flowing from the mountains in the north to the sea in the south, the view garden runs along a pedestrian concourse that is oriented on a north-south axis. The space offers travelers an opportunity to enjoy the mild and temperate climate amid lush greenery designed to evoke the verdant wetlands that once grew along the City's rivers and estuaries. An ipé wood 'river walk' defines the eastern edge of the garden, anchored on the north and south by doorways into the separate interior waiting areas. The wood walkway highlights the connection between the two separate wings of the airport and offers a nostalgic reminder of the wooden piers and boardwalks of Long Beach's past.

Accommodating functional requirements such as safety, security and circulation, while maintaining an inviting sense of human-scale, was the general design approach for the landscape upgrades. The new outdoor areas were articulated to relax weary travelers, and to make a positive impact on users. Space required for efficient pedestrian circulation was buffered from space required for sedentary purposes to minimize conflict of use, large expanses of required paving were patterned to relieve monotony, and an engaging relationship between landscape and hardscape was created to unify the space and enhance interest. Plant selection, together with appropriate plant layout and efficient irrigation-delivery systems, addressed water conservation considerations, while strengthening the experiential narrative.