

St. Monica Parish Schools Hilton Schoolyard
725 California Avenue
Santa Monica, CA 90403

St. Monica Parish is one of the largest and most active parishes in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The final piece of the parish master plan and development agreement with the City of Santa Monica was the Hilton Schoolyard, a redesign of the existing interior parking area made up of 130 spaces that for decades has doubled as a campus “quad” and play area for the 850-plus students, teachers and staff of the high school and elementary school on site.

The design principle of the Hilton Schoolyard is to alter the perception of a parking lot used as a schoolyard to a schoolyard that also functions as a parking lot. This approach provides students and their families with a sense of campus pride, identity and a new level of comfort. Additionally, the project adheres to the commitment by the parish to be a responsible, sustainable member of the community through increased green space, reduced heat island effect, flexible programming and storm water management.

The new design increases the existing landscape area of the 52,000 s.f. site by 75%, including planting areas with a palette of water conserving materials reflecting school colors and attractive to birds and butterflies. Increased planting areas reduce storm water run off and existing topography and drainage patterns were preserved to minimize the level of disturbance and debris during construction. The remaining run off is directed to an expansive, underground infiltration gallery that exceeds the Regional Water Quality Control Board requirements.

Concrete seat walls throughout the schoolyard bring children closer to plant materials. Active uses are centrally located for open circulation through the core of the schoolyard and access for all students, while allowing for primary vehicular circulation and parking. Colorful courts frame the central open space with asphalt coating materials used to define outdoor rooms. The surfacing materials exceed LEED requirements for heat gain and reflectivity for a more comfortable pedestrian environment.

Custom 15' x 20' x 15' tall steel and fabric shade structures, designed by the landscape architect, are placed in the parking area to increase shade coverage and create outdoor rooms for social and academic gatherings.

The landscape architect was the prime consultant from design to construction efforts, including managing the design process with parish administration and staff, receiving approval of the design at the Archdiocese Building Committee and City of Santa Monica Architecture Review Board and leading the consultant team of architects and engineers through permit drawings and construction, which needed to be done during the 10 weeks of summer break.

St. Monica is a non-profit institution so the landscape architect and construction team strictly adhered to the \$1million budget (including soft costs), which was provided through a private grant from a distinguished alumnus. Through diligent management, scheduling and in-field efforts during construction, the Hilton Schoolyard maintained the conceptual design intent and completed on time and within budget.

The redesign of the Hilton Schoolyard breathes new life into the daily experience of the St. Monica Parish Schools. Children are no longer secondary to practicality, and have an enhanced quality of life on a daily basis. The Hilton Schoolyard is a vibrant, active space matching the energy and commitment of the parish schools and its students while balancing the requirements of the parish and its environment.

St. Monica Parish Schools Hilton Schoolyard
725 California Avenue
Santa Monica, CA 90403

Image / Slide Captions

(Hilton Schoolyard 01) Illustrative Site Plan

(Hilton Schoolyard 02) Before photographs illustrate the existing conditions of the schoolyard lacking character or sense of place where asphalt parking and antiquated equipment dominate the students' only socialization and recreation space.

(Hilton Schoolyard 03) Efficient layout, strategic planting areas and paving interventions create a vibrant and energetic composition of spaces the unify the two schools and their varied activities and ages.

(Hilton Schoolyard 04) The synthetic turf, PureGrass by Astroturf, replaces an existing outdoor carpet donated by the LA Avengers Arena Football team that had become the primary green space for football and soccer practice, and had long outlasted its usefulness. The low pile turf reduces heat gain and is durable enough for everyday use.

(Hilton Schoolyard 05) Basketball / volleyball courts and a synthetic turf field are centrally located for easy access for physical education classes, team practice areas and open play. Seatwalls, Sycamore trees and custom shade structures create small rooms around the perimeter.

(Hilton Schoolyard 06) Required parking limits the opportunity to shade the large areas of paving through traditional tree canopies, so steel and fabric structures provide shade and become surreal candelabras at night. The pieces were custom designed by the landscape architect.

(Hilton Schoolyard 07) Shade structures and planting areas define the entry points of the various school buildings provide shade for small group gathering.

(Hilton Schoolyard 08) Colorful courts of representative school colors frame the active use areas and enhance school pride. Shade structures are grouped where students gather between classes and after school and provide a human scale in an otherwise expansive space.

(Hilton Schoolyard 09) The St. Monica High School Mariners have a wave pattern defining their primary gathering spaces and connecting each door of the two high school buildings, east and west, in two vibrant tones of green.