

Hercules Playa Vista

Los Angeles, CA

Project Identity and Location

The Hercules Campus at Playa Vista is the historic site of Hughes Aircraft where Howard Hughes built his wooden “Spruce Goose” and a host of other airplanes and helicopters. Previously slated as the site of the Dreamworks campus, the parcels assembled by that developer had been largely abandoned for approximately 30 years and stood derelict.

Purpose of Project

We were tasked to create a creative campus in conjunction with the renovation of six historic buildings that housed Hughes Aircraft Company. The 15-acre campus carries on the tradition of creativity and innovation rooted in the site’s history with a contemporary approach to corporate campus design. By providing outdoor spaces for workers that blur the line between work and play, comfort reigns supreme and fosters inspiration and innovation. Sweeping forms and smooth materials refer to the history of aviation innovation while a variety of spaces meet the needs of the office workers. A wooden deck through an existing grove of majestic California Sycamores provides space for impromptu meetings or individuals to work outside while protecting the roots of the trees. Ping pong tables and lawns provide recreational space, and two outdoor amphitheaters provide staging for events large and small.

Role of Landscape Architect

With a client that understands the connection between landscape and health, we were able to push the boundaries of how a corporate campus should look, feel, and operate. We made reference to both the site’s history of aviation innovation and its location in a sensitive ecological area throughout the design process, reiterating how crucial both of these were to the project’s success. In addition to utilizing a drought-tolerant plant palette, we preserved the historic grove of California Sycamores, designing a floating deck to protect the roots of the trees while creating a unique space for workers of the adjacent creative office spaces.

Significance

The adaptive re-use of a nationally historic space in combination with an innovative approach to corporate campus design makes this project a national model for sustainable development. This campus demonstrates how intelligent and sensitive campus planning can provide productive and healthy spaces to work. New ways of working, such as stand up bars for laptops or frequent outdoor conference, blur the lines and expand the walls of the traditional work space.

Special Factors

The project balances the historical significance of the Hughes Aircraft site with environmental sensitivity, as the site is located just upstream from the delicate ecology of the Ballona Wetlands. Historically registered buildings and aspects of the site were honored, influencing the preservation of existing trees and the addition of trees that treat and keep rainwater on site. This was all executed with a careful eye towards the larger master plan of Playa Vista: the site plan seamlessly connects to adjacent trails and parks.