

2016 SoCal ASLA Quality of Life Design Awards
Design-Parks and Recreation
Beacon Park, Irvine, California

Project Identity and Location

Beacon Park is the second neighborhood and park of the Great Park Neighborhoods, designed in tandem with the Orange County Great Park, a new master planned community located at the former Marine Corps Air Station El Toro in Irvine, California. The park was born from the idea of navigation and man's methods of traversing the world on land, over sea and in the air. Architectural, structural, and landscape forms were derived from mathematical equations used in navigation, which helped envision the park as a place where individuals of all ages can learn, explore, and discover.

Purpose of Project

Beacon Park represents informal yet highly sophisticated design. Various elements found throughout the park exemplify a design framework that seeks to engage and amaze visitors of all ages. Seamless transitions between the playgrounds, visitor center, art house, sports courts, pool and spa, great lawn, and a tree house-type structure called The Lookout were achieved through masterful planting design. The landscape vision for Beacon Park aimed to create a unique and naturalistic environment with plant groupings occurring as they would in nature, creating irregular and softer planting masses. Planting placement mimics natural propagation, as if seeds were dispersed by wind or animal. Overall, the planting design ignores the existence of man-made elements and creates the perception that the landscape existed long before any built features of the park. To further promote this idea, the developer strategically scheduled community parks throughout the master plan, including Beacon Park, to be built before housing elements to promote outdoor gathering and community engagement.

Role of Landscape Architect

The landscape architect was the lead consultant on the project, coordinating all design, pre-development, development, and maintenance efforts at the Park, including all built structures. Beacon Park broke from city standards and pushed the envelope through programming and design. Several meetings, presentations and modifications took place to achieve design objectives established by the developer, landscape architect, and City of Irvine. The end result is a robust, complex, yet engaging park environment that feels as though it grew out of the community and from the natural landscape found throughout this region of Southern California.

Significance

Beacon Park represents both civic and environmental stewardship through structural and landscape elements found throughout the park. The developer set out to create a community that is unlike any other by including design elements that intimately connect residents and visitors to the environment. Through a masterful partnership between the developer and landscape architect, each piece of the master plan was designed to follow that intent, and is being expressed through innovative recreations of traditional community park functions and features. As with all future planned parks within the Great Park, arriving at Beacon Park is first and foremost done on foot or by bike. Ample path systems bring residents and guests to the park from all directions with the least amount of disruption from vehicular traffic, promoting safety for all park-goers. While ease of access has also been considered for vehicles, parking has been strategic and spread to the parks perimeter to encourage mobility. Every three weeks throughout the summer months, the developer holds a community gathering at Beacon Park with food vendors, photo booths, music, and other attractions to bring neighbors, friends and family out of their homes and together in one place to enjoy each other openly in this unique setting.

Special Factors

Beacon Park is centrally located within the neighborhood to ensure ease of access, and was designed to provide a space for engaging, enriching, and stimulating activities with a new design vernacular. Basketball courts are multi-functional and can be used for performances, community events, sports, games, and general play. Playgrounds are challenging, from easy to difficult, blend in with nature, act as sculpture, and encourage open play without being contained or fenced. The Lookout, the park's tree house, is adventurous, fun, sculptural, and iconic while providing a naturally ventilated and cooled one-of-a-kind outdoor environment. The visitor center provides a vast and strategic vantage point where the entire park can be seen and children can be monitored by their parents and guardians. Beacon Park had several design challenges that shaped the final product into a multi-functional space suitable for all ages. The greatest obstacle was The Lookout. The concept was a large lounge space nestled among three large heritage trees that could be enjoyed by many groups, of all ages, at the same time. The landscape architect worked in tandem with the landscape developer to 3D model the three trees to perfectly integrate the tree house platform and curvilinear skywalk through the branches and between trees utilizing CAD and Rhino 3D technology. The result was a three inch margin of error that the project team met, saving any invasive measures that could have damaged the historic trees.