

Monet Avenue 2.0 Rancho Cucamonga, California

Purpose of Project: Retail development is struggling and landscape architecture has the solution.

Victoria Gardens is a model of contemporary retail development. It acts as one of the only high-quality public spaces in the Inland Empire. Organized as a series of retail streets, it has been one of the most successful retail developments of the last decade. Despite its financial success and lack of local competition, portions of the project began to see a drop in visitors, and on one street, Monet Avenue, eventually leading to storefront vacancies. The developer hypothesized that e-commerce was taking its toll on business and reached out to our design team for a solution.

The Solution, give the public what e-commerce cannot—an enjoyable, memorable experience. We believe that brick-and-mortar shopping today is more about the recreational experience than convenience. As landscape architects we are uniquely suited to create this type of experience, especially for outdoor retail environments.

Our investigation of the site revealed that the streets with the best pedestrian experience were the most frequented. Others, like Monet Avenue, with its narrower sidewalks and lack of amenities, were almost deserted. The solution seemed simple: build the pedestrian experience and they will come.

The enhancement of the pedestrian experience at Victoria Gardens was focused around four interventions. First, the amount of pedestrian space was lacking. To increase it, under-used parallel parking stalls were removed in favor of a widened pedestrian realm. Second, the new larger space was populated with outdoor café seating from the street's many restaurants, thus providing a layer of vitality to the space. Third, a series of pedestrian nodes and plazas were created at regular intervals to help facilitate interaction and heighten the social experience. Fourth, a layer of art was introduced. The lines between traditional landscape architecture, art, and sculpture were blurred to create functional elements that promote aesthetic curiosity that draw people into and throughout the site.

One year after completion, the project has seen a major increase in users. The adjacent retail spaces have gone from once-empty storefronts to necessitating a waiting list for future tenants. Quality public space is now available for both shoppers and the general public alike.

Role of Landscape Architect: Brought in at a very early stage, the landscape architect, partnering with the architect and developer, was tasked with diagnosing the declining use of the complex, finding a solution to the decline, and implementing it. By concentrating on the public pedestrian realm the team was able to create both a financially successful product for the owner, and also a high-quality space for the public.

Significance: Rancho Cucamonga and the Inland Empire are notorious for its lack of quality public space. Monet 2.0 continues Victoria Gardens' commitment to quality public space for the Inland Empire and adds additional layers of art and sustainability. It also provides a landscape architectural solution for struggling retail developments and main streets by implementing strong pedestrian and social spaces.

Special Factors: Remodeling existing projects can be especially difficult. By removing the parallel parking and changing the curb line, we were forced to deal with the storm water curb inlets. Moving these inlets would be expensive and necessitate an improvement to the entire project's storm water infrastructure totaling more than the project budget. Our solution was to retain the existing curb inlets, return the proposed curbs to them, and bridge over these new returns. The bridge solution was elevated into something more than function by treating each bridge as an inexpensive sculpture. As we reimagined Monet Avenue, we began to explore the prefix "re." Each of the eight bridges features one of the "re" words that the streetscape design was predicated upon: RETHINK, RECLAIM, RESHAPE, REFRESH, REBUILD, REPLANT, RENEW, and REFLECT.