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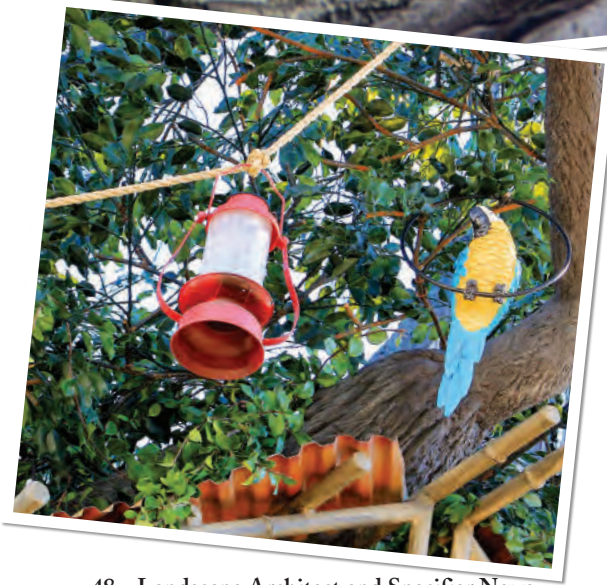

Swiss Family Robinson Meets Urban Jungle

Photos by Breslin Builders and Cre8Play

Las Vegas is a city where the large majority of new construction is focused on gambling and glitz, where bright lights, spectacular fountains and huge, expensive themed hotels/casinos are the norm.

But Vegas is also about just regular people and families who wake up each day and go about getting ready for the day: eating breakfast, getting the kids off to school and Mom and Dad off to work. And when it comes to family entertainment, they crave affordable, down to earth activities and places to go that don't involve gambling and Strip fountains.

The Birth of Downtown Container Park

Vegas residents were excited to learn that something completely different was proposed for the community—Downtown Container Park. Situated in old Vegas at the southeast corner of Fremont and 7th, Container Park is by design not the Strip. The project came together when a passionate group of people (Downtown Project) dedicated their time and efforts to help the community. Led by Zappos CEO Tony Hseih, this talented team placed value in people over real estate, and set out to transform the old downtown into a community-focused city.

Looking for Starbucks? You won't find one in Downtown Container Park, only local eateries, exhibits and music in a family-friendly environment. This $350 million project brought the community together through a one-of-a-kind design and sustainable building materials. Its raw vibe has created quite the buzz among developers and landscape architects around the country, and has them thinking way outside the box.

Right: The 'tree' at Container Park in Las Vegas is a GFRC (glass fiber reinforced concrete) and secondary steel structure. For verisimilitude, real foliage—Star jasmine and English ivy—sprouts out the top and is on an irrigation timer. The tree house is made of composite wood decking. The corrugated metal for the tree house roof was "aged" to make it appear it has been exposed to the elements for years.

Left: Forest creatures like squirrels and robins inhabit the tree, but are not always obvious. The tree is alive in other ways, too. A closer look at the trunk (top photo) reveals the outline of a llama.

Top Right
Three of the four repurposed shipping containers for the playground have accessible ramps for wheel chairs. Seating and white lights strung throughout the park invite people to sit and sample the local eateries. The concrete pavers out front were laid by Vantage Concepts, Las Vegas, who also installed the landscape plantings.

Above
With the concrete foundations in place, one of the 40-ft. repurposed, redesigned shipping containers for the interactive play exhibit is moved into a stand up position. "There were no sections in the zoning code, nor were there building codes that specifically outlined repurposed shipping containers," explains Todd McBrayer, LEED AP, director of design for Breslin Builders, who worked closely with Las Vegas city departments to ensure the shipping containers were viable as "buildings" and play structures.

Bottom Right
The fenced play space with amphitheater-like seating features the electronic EOS 360 (Playworld Systems) interactive game piece, which requires brisk and quick movements. There are also polyethylene foam BlueBlocks for aspiring builders. The vital shade structures are from USA Shade. Cre8Play designed the play surfacing, which was poured-in-place by Evan's Recreation. Pistache trees flank the play area.

"With Downtown Project, we like things that are unique, first and best," said Trish Buck-Martin, who started the Kids and Family project for Downtown Project. In fact, no one had ever approached the Las Vegas Building and Safety Department with anything like it.

Repurposing Shipping Containers

The first obstacle was to avoid costly new construction, and quickly get local businesses up and running. Enter Breslin Builders, 30-year veterans to southern Nevada, specializing in sustainable and environmental-friendly design. The company was challenged to design a park using repurposed shipping containers that would span an area of more than 56,000 square feet.

"Building with shipping containers was by far the most interesting aspect of this project," said Todd McBrayer, LEED AP, director of design for Breslin Builders. Breslin specializes in green design and construction practices. It has partnered with Nevada Construction Clean Up to recycle dumpsters on all its

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Project Team

Downtown Project

Downtown Container Park

Design-build general contractor: Breslin Builders,

Design-build interactive play and art exhibit: Cre8Play

Designed surfacing: Cre8Play

Play pieces

-NEOS 360 (electronic), Playworld Systems

-BlueBlocks: KaBoom!

Recreation local rep: Big T Recreation

Rubber pour-in-place surfacing installer: Evan's Recreation Installations

Structural modifications to shipping containers: Con Global

Above and Top Right
A rope-meshed, 30-degree cantilevered lookout tower offers a great view atop the 40-foot slide container. There's a red light/green light slide safety boarding system timed to audio-visual displays: visuals of a galactic star field, a 'hyperdrive,' a fish tank and more. A sonic boom with a blast of air makes kids feel like they're launched off into space. The slides are made of rotationally molded polyethylene.

Middle Right
The Wonky Bridge connects the two large towers (shipping containers on end). Floor boards vary in thicknesses and its elevation changes, hence "Wonky." While the bridge gives the illusion of instability, the design makes for a completely stable bridge that is universally accessible and suited for wheelchairs. The bamboo-like poles are made of steel with sculpting epoxy and composite wood.

constructions sites where materials are sorted, with more than 80 percent of construction debris diverted from the landfills. Although reusing shipping containers was a first for Las Vegas, they have been used as construction offices, as office space in east London, and to house clothing and coffee shops in San Francisco. There are condos, business centers, homes and even hotels reemploying shipping containers. Vegas is using shipping containers in a 1.3 acre park to give local entrepreneurs ready-made retail establishments: eateries, shops, boutiques and bars, to name a few. The containers are also used for community offices, art exhibits and the subject of this feature, an interactive playground.

"There were no sections in the zoning code, nor were there building codes that specifically outlined repurposed shipping containers," McBrayer notes. Breslin worked closely with various city departments to ensure using shipping containers as buildings could be achieved. Also commissioned for the project was Cre8Play, a custom play environment company based in New Hope, Minnesota. Buck-Martin was tipped off by a Zappos employee who had seen the custom play designer and builder featured on an episode of American Choppers (Paul Jr. Designs) on the Discovery Network. "I started to do some research and decided custom [play elements] could really be a cool avenue to take a look at," Buck-Martin explains.

Interactive Play

Downtown Project wanted a family-oriented playground and art exhibit in the center of the

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Above and Inset
A ramp network connects the towers. All the decking is MoistureShield composite wood. Interactive panels, such as a sunken treasure hunt (pictured just inside the shorter tower) engage the children.

Right
The Wind Spinner comprises thin, geometric decorative blue stainless steel pieces strung on an aluminum frame, which in turn is affixed to a shipping container. A slight breeze is all that's needed to get the colorful metal spinning.

park. The theme is 'Swiss Family Robinson' meets urban jungle. Cre8Play, was intrigued and delighted to design and build play around and within the shipping containers. Buck-Martin recalls some play equipment manufacturers came out and gave quotes, but the play equipment was right out of their catalogs. Cre8Play, however, had a vision of slides winding in and out of the containers. The slide atop the 40-foot container has a red light/green light safety boarding system timed to audio-visual displays. Built-in sensors trigger the interactive elements. Inside the tube slide are visuals of a galactic star field, a hyperdrive and a fish tank. A sonic boom with a blast of air makes kids feel like they're launching off into space. From the top there's a dramatic 30-degree cantilevered lookout tower. There's also a massive tree house and a beautiful artistic wind spinner.

Repurposed Materials Are Raising the Bar

Downtown Container Park set an example of what can be done with containers, not just as buildings, but also as play structures and decks. Repurposed materials are something everyone can get behind. Cre8Play uses recycled and recyclable steel and 95 percent recycled composite decking. The playground company also recycles scrap steel, and says its GFRC (glass fiber reinforced concrete) structures produce zero chemical offgassing or byproducts.

The Community Has Embraced the Park

Since Downtown Container Park opened, the community has embraced the park as its own little town within the city. Hundreds visit the park daily to enjoy the local food and activities. It's a safe, clean environment that's a nice diversion from the gambling and party scene. The beauty of the containers is they can be used over and over again. The park has developers thinking about what other materials could be repurposed. What will the next big idea be?

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