



GRAND PARK DESIGN BACKGROUNDER

Grand Park is a unified, pedestrian-friendly civic space, urban park and signature destination for downtown Los Angeles, representing the many faces, corners and cultures of the county through special curated events and experiences.

Los Angeles-based RIOS (formerly Rios Clementi Hale Studios) designed Grand Park, a 12-acre, four block public park in downtown Los Angeles that stretches from The Music Center on the west to City Hall on the east. The firm, which specializes in architecture, landscape architecture, planning, interiors and product design, engaged in a multi-year planning process (2010–2012) that included interactive workshops and forums with community groups, arts entities, civic and governmental bodies and neighborhood constituents to create the final result.

Grand Park’s landscape design and architecture establish a distinctive, interconnected and inviting civic space. The design is inspired by the diversity of the people of the region, both explicitly and implicitly, in the variety of the park’s lawns, terraces, plazas and gardens. Grand Park is a public space that reclaimed a key urban site to celebrate the Los Angeles of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Representing Los Angeles, the lush vegetation echoes the region’s numerous backyard gardens, featuring open lawns, native gardens, shady spaces and Grand Park’s signature pink table and chairs that can be moved in any configuration or area by park visitors. Another nod to the diverse communities of Los Angeles are the park’s signage totems (designed by Sussman/Prejza & Company) that welcome visitors to “the park for everyone” in the 25 languages that are listed on Los Angeles County voter registration forms.

The terraced entry to the park from Grand Avenue immediately engages the public, extending naturally from Grand Avenue’s sidewalk to the Fountain Overlook and offering views of the iconic fountain, interactive splash pad and the surrounding landscaping. The switchbacks and all ADA ramps and railings are lit from underneath, giving the park a beautiful, dramatic glow as visitors walk down to the fountain.

Grand Park is organized into four public spaces or “blocks.” In Blocks One and Two, visitors will find the Fountain Overlook with the regal Arthur J. Will Memorial Fountain and interactive splash pad (developed by Fluidity Design Consultants); Grand Park’s administrative office, public restrooms, an ATM and a Starbucks outpost; an Olive Court plaza space marking the historic alignment of Olive Street with 16 olive trees and Mediterranean plantings, as well as historic speaker poles and benches; and the Performance Lawn with broad expanses of grass and a small stage. This shady lawn area incorporates several existing Jacaranda trees and is surrounded by various gardens containing plants from North America, Australia and Southeast Asia.

In Blocks Three and Four, visitors will find the Community Terrace, a large central plaza surrounded by gardens from each of the world's six Floristic Kingdoms; small lawn areas for picnics and lounging; a Flag Garden; the Broadway Steps that provide ADA access down to the street level and informal stepped-seating areas; the Event Lawn, an open, flexible area for large public gatherings and marketplace; and a dog run and children's playground, both open year-round. Wide steps—along with ADA-accessible ramps, switchback paths and landscaping—mitigate the 90 feet of grade change throughout the length of the park.

Landscape Details

The floristic gardens, a crucial element of the design, beautify the park with nearly 150 of the site's existing mature trees, 50 of which were removed during construction and returned to the park and re-planted. The diverse plant palette stems from the organization of the world's six Floristic Kingdoms—Boreal, Neotropical, Paleotropical, South African, Australian and Antarctic. While these regions have occurred due to specific environmental factors, Los Angeles provides a climate of easy adaptation for the various plant communities of the world to come together. This great global pageant of plants pays tribute to Los Angeles' wonderfully diverse population.

Intermingled with native plantings, species from the various floristic regions are organized into gardens that are distributed along the length of the park. Garden markers (designed by Sussman/Prejza & Company) resemble oversized garden stakes and indicate the region, describe the climate and talk about the specific characteristics of the featured plant.

Grand Park was designed to be environmentally sensitive in several respects. A series of filtration planters and dispersed lawns filter more than five million gallons of water annually before it reaches city storm drains. Large expanses of grass feature the hybrid Bermuda species, which was selected for its durability and drought resistance. Additionally, drought-resistant plantings minimize water use and are irrigated primarily via sub-surface water-efficient drip tubing that delivers water directly to the root zones. The landscape was laid out so that plants that require more sun are concentrated on the north end of the park. As visitors progressively move south, they find the gardens with plants that require more and more shade.

Arthur J. Will Memorial Fountain

The historic Arthur J. Will Memorial Fountain was named after one of the County's previous chief executive officers and has been in the park for more than 60 years. When Grand Park opened in 2012, the fountain, with an upper and lower pool, was fully restored and upgraded to contain energy-efficiency pumps with two systems, using less water than before. The upper pool contains treated water but is not accessible for the public to enter. The fountain runs each day until midnight, with colorful light shows running until 10 p.m. each night. The lower pool has its own system where the water is specially treated and filtered as it feeds into the popular splash pad. The splash pad is not slippery when wet and invites children of all ages to enjoy its water play.

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