2011 ASLA Design Awards

Residences at Little Nell
Honor Award
Design Workshop - Aspen

Design over $500,000 Construction Budget
ASLA Colorado 2011 Design Awards
Category 1A: Design (over $500,000 construction budget)

Project Name | Residences at the Little Nell
Project Location | Aspen, Colorado

Project Summary
Residences at The Little Nell is strategically located adjacent to the Silver Queen Gondola portal at the base of world-famous Aspen Mountain in Aspen, Colorado. The landscape architecture of this five-star fractional ownership condominium hotel supports the high quality hospitality amenities and services, direct ski in and ski out access, and unparalleled views of the West Elk Mountain Range from downtown Aspen.

Purpose of the Project
Settled in the mid 19th Century as a mining camp, Aspen is a tourist, second home and international destination, nestled in the Roaring Fork Valley surrounded by the White River National Forest. Aspen Mountain was the first of four mountains developed for winter recreation in the 20th century. The site, located approximately 8000 feet above sea level, was originally developed as the lower basin terminus of a mining lift that moved miners and equipment up the mountain to nearby quarries and mining shafts. After the fall of mining in the late 19th century, the site sat underutilized until after World War II, when a small restaurant and apartment building was constructed. Fifty years later, the site was used in this capacity. In 2001, master planning and design began in redeveloping the site for a five star resort, which commenced at some of the highest rates ever experienced in the world in the ownership club market. By the summer of 2005, construction had commenced and in 2008, Residences at The Little Nell greeted their first tenants and opened approximately 35,000 square feet of retail.

Construction Budget
The investment for landscape architecture and site work, including water features, was approximately $4 million.

Role of Landscape Architect
The landscape architect provided design services for the entire site program including Dean Avenue pedestrian promenade and retail promenade, porte cochere, dining el fresco terrace, gondola terrace expansion, courtyard terraces, surrounding landscape and access improvements, and the rooftop terrace and water garden. Due to the site constraints and building program, nearly ¾ of the landscape architecture improvements are on structure conditions over parking garages or residential units.

The Dean Avenue pedestrian and retail promenade design was centered on the concept of creating the front porch and welcome statement to the development. The improvements created a safe, functional and highly designed pedestrian corridor linking the clientele from adjacent developments such as Hyatt Grand Aspen and Hotel St. Regis to Residences at The Little Nell retail edge and ultimately the gondola. The custom designed corridor effectively links the project to the community and reflects the timeless character of Aspen, while providing innovation in detailing, seating, lighting and color composition. Special attention was given to the scale, sun/shade balance and comfort of the east/west corridor which is edged by buildings approximately forty feet in height.

The dining el fresco terrace, is anchored by a high end restaurant and opens directly onto the Silver Queen Gondola Terrace, an important criteria to ensure that the restaurant could capture guests coming off the mountain at the end of the day, while providing a destination for people watching and interaction. Capturing south facing sun, which is critical to human comfort in a cold mountain environment, the terrace design celebrates the sites former mining heritage with a wall water feature which creates a soft white noise for restaurant users. The water wall feature culminates on a series of modern bronze pots, abstracting sleuths that were used in mining practices. The terrace accentuates the importance of north/south orientation in ski resort environments while allowing uninterrupted views of the gondola and the mountain.
The lower courtyard, built over the parking garage, sits approximately fifteen feet below the dining el fresco terrace, completely surrounded by the building, ranging up to 50 feet in height on three sides. Using inspiration from the adjacent hillside quarry and mining shaft, the courtyard uses stone and Aspen trees in a provocative manner, while reducing the burdened scale of the adjacent building edge. A series of four planting islands are designed to be remnants of former mining practices. Aspen trees were planted to create an immediate stand of vegetation stretching to the sky, a common natural remediation of former mining sites. This planting scheme provided a pedestrian scale to the space, while providing striking color variety of cream (bark), chartreuse green (summer foliage) and brilliant yellow (autumn foliage) to the tan stone building façade. The understory of the four raised planting beds utilized Scented Geraniums and Hostas to ensure resort guests using this space a pleasant but distinct aroma. Because the courtyard is sunken and surrounded on all four sides, it receives very little light. A fire pit was designed to allow for intimate gatherings and to provide warmth to the space. As a backdrop to the four planting islands and fire pit, is a fifteen foot by seventy foot gabion wall environmental art installation created by the landscape architect and a fellow artist. Cantilevered twelve inches off the face of a twenty foot tall wall, the environmental art installation abstracts the strata of the earth, reflective of the exposed mining faces left on the site from a century past. Use of native stone slowly transitioning in color from creams to dark browns cradle the river cobble strata band that traverses through the art piece. At night, a hidden LED light band provides a soft glow along the river cobble strata. This art piece can only be seen from within the courtyard and a selected few units facing the courtyard, thus acting as a revealing element as one enters the space.

The final piece, and most relevant from a marketing and guest experience perspective, is the rooftop terrace and water garden. Located on top of one of the tallest buildings in Aspen, the viewer gains a 270 degree uninterrupted view of the West Elk Mountain Range. In 2011, Bing.com listed this space in their top 20 rooftop pools around the world. Taking advantage of the 300 days of sunshine that Aspen offers, the water garden concept is based on a reflective sky. Using water as a source of reflectivity, figuratively and literally, the water garden space includes a series of water based program including a swimming pool and two spas. One of the spas and the pool are located together for more leisurely and group activity, while the other spa is perched on the edge of the rooftop and surrounded by a reflecting water body, tall grasses and a native Pine tree, grown naturally in a bonsai manner, which was collected from a nearby cliff. This spa provides one of kind views over the city, and toward significant mountain peaks, and faces west to capture Aspen brilliant sunsets. The rooftop garden is truly a garden environment meant for outdoor enjoyment. Anchored on multiple small group seating areas and a fire pit, the planting design for the gardens are anticipated to heighted the senses through use of seasonal color, textures, and aroma. As the backdrop of this space is the sky and distant mountains, the use of European Aspens provide a pedestrian scale, summer shade and dramatic color.

Special Factors
Composed on a very tight site, The Residences at The Little Nell utilizes over structure spaces to maximize the amount of open space amenities available to guests while setting the highest standard for a five star resort.

Significance
Unlike many high end resorts, The Residences as The Little Nell, does not create an isolated oasis onto itself, rather it reaches out to the surrounding uses and community. This high level of interaction helps to create a successful and sustainable tourism destination, with a sense of community that provides a feeling of belonging for residents and visitors alike. Those attributes entice vacationers to return and encourage residents to flourish.