2011 ASLA Design Awards

Solterra
Merit Award
Design Studios West

Design over $500,000 Construction Budget
Solterra is a 363 acre planned community that features a unique landscape master plan that integrates neighborhood entries, streetscaping, community recreation center, open space corridors, and trail networks. When completely developed, the community will encompass a wide range of home styles including luxury single family homes, patio homes, townhomes, and luxury apartments. Later phases will also include a neighborhood village with shops and services. The plan of the community, the landscape, and the architectural character are all inspired by the hill towns of the Tuscany region of Italy. The dramatically south facing slope of the site provides spectacular views that are preserved and enhanced by carefully locating home sites with respect to the topography and by providing generous open space corridors containing a trail network linking to public parkland on Green Mountain to the north and Bear Creek Lake to the south. East-west corridors link existing neighborhoods to the east with Red Rocks Park to the west.

The purpose of the Landscape Design Master Plan project was to organize the internal neighborhoods around open space corridors containing a well-connected trail network, give the community an identifiable entry and streetscape, and create a community center with attractive outdoor areas for the residents to gather. The intent was also to accomplish the inspired Tuscan design theme in a sustainable manner and in concert with the environmental factors of the site.

The construction costs for the completed phases of the landscape plan are over $4,100,000.00.

The role of the landscape architect/entrant was to capture the owner’s vision for the community and implement the design theme with careful site planning of all elements, achieving an exotic landscape with native and drought tolerant plant material, using architectural elements and themes for the entry features and community center, especially the outdoor spaces. The landscape architect worked closely with the owner, architect, and engineers to achieve these goals on this challenging site. The landscape architect was responsible for all landscape concepts, plans, specifications and construction administration.
The design of the Solterra community represents a significant impact on the public's perception of what can be achieved by exemplary landscape architecture when applied to a challenging site to develop. The site of a previously failed development, Solterra has now shown what can be accomplished when challenging soil and weather conditions are properly addressed through good design and engineering. The careful study of the land forms and the precise placement of open space corridors, drainages, access roads, and trails have resulted in a successful integration of this new community into the greater surrounding context. Surrounded by large, public, and very well-used parks, Solterra now links these destinations through its own open space and trail network.

While the Solterra residents are the obvious users of the community amenities, citizens of the several jurisdictions that come together at this location were very involved in accomplishing long term goals of open space and trail connections through the development of this community. The undeveloped site was "enjoyed" for years by local residents as a visual foreground to the mountains beyond, a place to let pets run free and for hiking. These needs have been met by incorporating these uses and features into the overall design of the spaces and their connectivity.

The placement of a public park at the top of the hill has created a special overlook feature and picnic area that has been preserved from development. The public dog park has become an attractive regional feature for residents within the metropolitan area and the trails linking the other adjacent public parks pass under local streets to enhance the off-street trail experience. The community center, called The Retreat, incorporates special design elements such as the iconic bell tower that serves as a visual and audial landmark for the region. The design of the outdoor spaces incorporates Tuscan courtyard elements and materials. Water features lead down to the pool that focuses and enhances the striking view of Red Rocks as water spills into a lower pool that welcomes residents from the trail entrance. These unique features have made Solterra stand out as a desirable community in the region.

The foothills of the Rocky Mountains provide an environment of extreme weather and growing conditions that required a landscape design, plant palette and irrigation design that was truly sustainable. Low water use plants were chosen as well as some native plants to ensure a sustainable landscape. Irrigation, where needed for establishment, has complex controls and wind sensors to optimize efficiency. Taking advantage of the south facing slope of the site, solar panels provide auxiliary power for the recreation facilities of The Retreat.

Solterra (a coined word meaning Land of the Sun) represents an excellent example of landscape design responding to the environment and the needs of the community.
The Retreat at Solterra

CONCEPT SKETCH
Waterfall between Upper and Lower Pools