



design matters

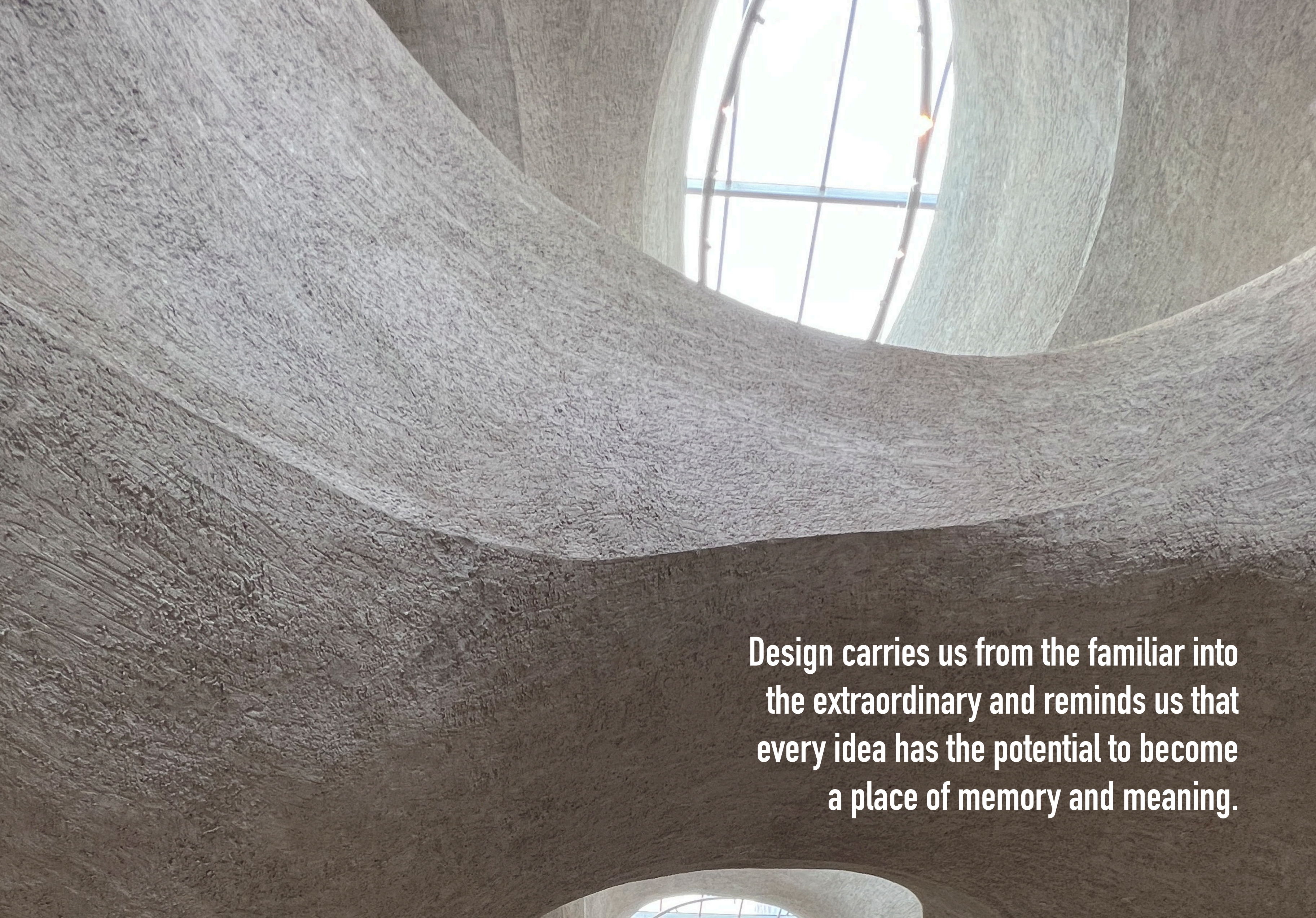
A VISUAL GUIDE INTO THE LIFE OF EDSA

_EDGES OF OPPORTUNITY
WATERFRONT REDEVELOPMENT + ACTIVATION

_DESIGN MEETS PURPOSE
THE EDSA DIFFERENCE

_GAME CHANGERS
SPORTS + ENTERTAINMENT URBAN ANCHORS

_HOSPITALITY'S NEXT FRONTIER
TRAVEL, TRENDS + TRANSFORMATION



**Design carries us from the familiar into
the extraordinary and reminds us that
every idea has the potential to become
a place of memory and meaning.**

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WHAT'S INSIDE



Life moves pretty fast

Together, we sit in the front row, watching a world that is rapidly changing around us. From global politics and technological advances to environmental challenges and cultural shifts, the pace of change has never been faster.

In this moment, the role of designers and planners feels more important than ever. We have the opportunity to serve as catalysts for positive transformation, fostering real connections, meaningful interactions, and above all, a stronger sense of community. Pretty cool place to be.

At times, I believe this is the best job in the world. We have the privilege of partnering with clients and colleagues to help shape a future that is both inspired and resilient. What makes it even better is the spirit that unites us at EDSA: camaraderie, collaboration, and a creative process that is agile, inclusive, and innovative.

This is the right time and the right place to push ourselves further – beyond aesthetics and memorable experiences. The real goal is to create places that resonate on a deeper level and in lasting ways, places that deliver measurable impact and value. That is a responsibility we take seriously, but we also know how to enjoy the journey. Having fun, building friendships, and staying inspired along the way are all part of what makes the work meaningful. Working with the best clients – our friends – and helping them reach their goals is what drives us forward.

It is an exciting time to be in that front row, and with 65 years in business, EDSA continues to evolve and build momentum. This issue of Design Matters offers a snapshot of how our team has spread its wings – embracing new opportunities and relationships while delivering work that shapes the world in a positive and joyful way.

Our world may move fast, but our goal is not only to keep up – it's to stay half a step ahead: challenging ourselves to think bigger, act bolder, have some fun, and design with purpose. Together, we can shape a more connected, resilient, enjoyable world. And we have a good time doing it. That is what we get to do every day.

Best job ever.

B. Scott LaMont, PLA ASLA
CEO & Principal



Edges of Opportunity

More than 3 billion people live within 100 kilometers of a coastline and demand for access is accelerating. From city riverfronts to remote island retreats, the water's edge remains one of the world's most coveted environments. More than just high-valued land, these prized thresholds are where public life, ecology, and culture come together in surprisingly intricate ways.

From Passive Periphery to Shoreline Activation

Alive with global trade and local industry, waterfronts of the 19th and early 20th centuries were engines of economic vitality – where cities met the world. But, as those functions receded, left behind were disconnected and underutilized lands. Now, both natural and engineered waterways are being rediscovered as dynamic interfaces for commerce and community.

As platforms for engagement, regeneration, and identity, today's waterfronts are some of the most inspiring canvases for innovation. "The water's edge is a space of synthesis," shares Pablo Massari, an EDSA Principal. "As places where natural systems and human experiences come together, waterfronts are no longer passive boundaries but catalysts for new ways of living, working, and gathering."

STEAKHOUSE RESTAURANT
SCREEN WALL AROUND EXISTING SERVICE AREA

LOADING DOCK/SERVICE AREA

FESTIVAL PLAZA SPACE
PROVIDE SERVICES FOR STAND-ALONE RETAIL CARTS IN PLAZA SPACE.

TREES TO PROVIDE SHADE FOR PLAZA WHILE NOT DISRUPTING VIEWS FROM RESTAURANT

CARIBBEAN RESTAURANT
ITALIAN RESTAURANT

ACCESS FROM FERRY
SERVICE AREA AND LOADING



“As places where natural systems and human experiences come together, waterfronts are no longer passive boundaries but catalysts for new ways of living, working, and gathering.”
— Pablo Massari

Coastal edges are where cities meet the water and where people often come to connect, celebrate, and unwind. “They serve as the front porches to civic life,” suggests Lianying Wang, a Principal at EDSA. “But today, these spaces must do more than welcome visitors. They also need to protect against rising seas, restore biodiversity, and attract long-term investment.” Meeting these demands calls for a new approach. “We must balance performance with presence – integrating function, accessibility, and beauty to strengthen the bond between people, nature, and one another.”

One powerful example is the planning of a future urban peninsula located between Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau. Currently defined by farmland and climate vulnerability, the site required more than flood protection. “Rather than defaulting to expensive infrastructure,” explains Wang, “we developed a framework that integrates ecological systems with vibrant public spaces – restoring wetlands, creating blue carbon zones, and embracing the topography to manage water naturally. Our approach also weaves in mixed-use amenities and social programming to foster community resilience and human engagement.”

Waterfronts thrive when designed for diverse, overlapping uses that activate the space throughout the day. “It’s not about one use, it’s about multiple uses,” asserts Wang. This variety attracts different groups of people, keeping the area lively and naturally safer through activity and informal surveillance.

For instance, Fort Lauderdale’s Las Olas Oceanside Park transforms a former parking lot into a dynamic community gathering place that serves as the heart of the community. Similarly, in Sanya, China, a coastal development integrates a curated mix of cultural programs that activates the space throughout the year – creating a vibrant destination that not only celebrates local heritage but also drives economic growth.



LAS OLAS OCEANSIDE PARK | FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

Experience by Design

As the role of waterfronts evolve, so too does an understanding of what makes them meaningful. “We’re redefining what a waterfront can be,” remarks Jeff Suiter, a Principal at EDSA. “It’s not just about access, aesthetics, or scenery. It’s about layered, sensory connections that serve visitors, residents, and ecosystems alike.”

Foundational to this redefinition is experience-driven design. Suiter clarifies, “The presence of water alone no longer satisfies. People want to interact with it, walk beside it, paddle through it, sit above it, even wade into it.” This expectation has fueled a wave of design innovations centered on immersion. “Every edge should invite participation – whether launching a kayak, casting a line, diving in for a swim, or simply taking in the view.”

“Proximity to water is a way to elevate both experience and equity. Every edge should invite participation.”

— Jeff Suiter

RAINTREE RIVERWALK RESIDENCES | FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

Nearly 60% of the firm’s current projects include a waterfront component and more than half of those integrate strategies for resilience and activation. “Proximity to water is a way to elevate both experience and equity,” notes Suiter. This people-first mindset extends beyond layout to creating welcoming environments that prioritize pedestrians.

“Design for users, not parking,” emphasizes Suiter. “By moving cars away from the water’s edge, we reclaim valuable space for comfort and social connection. Then, using thoughtful features like curved pathways and spatial sequencing, visitors are invited into a deeper waterfront experience – making it a place to explore and enjoy, not just pass by.”

At Solare, a residential community in Ras El Hekma, Egypt, EDSA blended private sanctuaries and public amenities to engage residents and the broader community. Offering opportunities for connection on multiple levels, the design includes outdoor theaters, boardwalks, picnic gardens, communal areas, cantilevered overlooks, and waterside trails.

Similarly, Raintree Riverwalk in Fort Lauderdale reimagines a once fragmented shoreline as a civic connector. Native plantings, step-down access points, boat ramps, and flood-adaptive infrastructure transform what was once a utilitarian corridor into a social and ecological hub. “It’s about more than access. It’s about creating places with lasting identity and fostering community through intentional design,” affirms Suiter.

In each case, water remains the magnet – a unifying element that organizes movement, sightlines, and scalable uses. By integrating marinas, parks, and plazas, spaces come together to form a seamless experience. Central to this approach is an emphasis on accessible transitions that naturally invite people to the water’s edge. This aligns with mandates in places like the Bahamas and Florida, where public waterfront access is both a legal requirement and a moral imperative. In these regions, developments must preserve or ‘give back’ portions of the waterfront to ensure these spaces remain open and welcoming.

At their best, the most compelling water-adjacent environments act as cultural mirrors, showcasing the rhythms, stories, and textures of their communities. In example, forward-looking projects are creating active, thriving waterfronts where city and nature meet, recreation and real estate support each other, and climate resilience is built into the very bones of the design.

Wang explains, “Achieving the right balance between openness and privacy is essential to making waterfronts welcoming and functional for everyone.” One way to achieve that balance is by creating a clear hierarchy of spaces – from fully public zones to more intimate, semi-private areas. This kind of intentional layering keeps the waterfront accessible while offering moments of comfort, retreat, and exclusivity. “Done well, it doesn’t just respond to the site, it transforms the waterfront into a vibrant stage for community life and a powerful expression of place.”

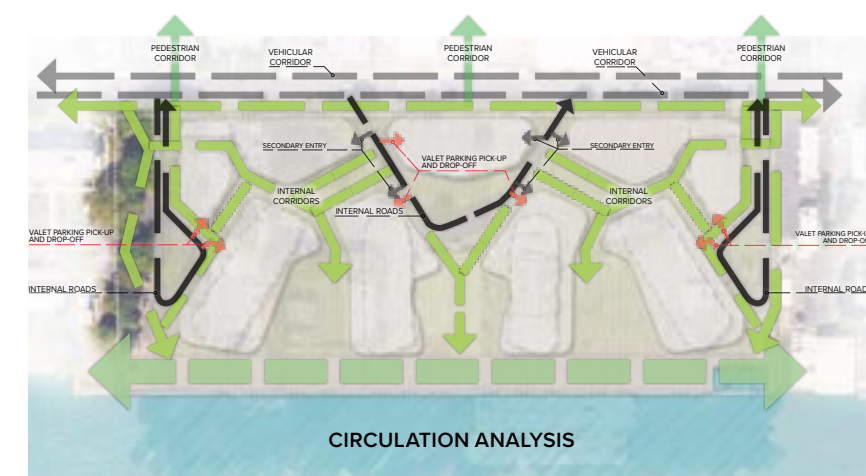
Fluid Frameworks for the Future

Designing along the water’s edge requires a level of flexibility and humility that wasn’t as common in previous decades. “There’s an inherent complexity to these sites,” says Massari. “They often occupy the most desirable but also the most vulnerable land. We’re contending with ecological sensitivities, legacy infrastructure, and public expectation while trying to create something lasting.”

Massari continues, “Ten years ago, I might have led with a bold gesture. Now, I think more about framework – how can we host a broader conversation between the site, the people, and the future.” In practice, that might mean elevating landscapes to accommodate sea-level rise, restoring natural dune systems to buffer storm surge, or creatively reusing existing structures to preserve local character. In some cases, it’s about building amphibious programming with spaces that flex between dry and wet conditions or designing for events that shift with the seasons and tides. “The emphasis is on developing a design that responds, rather than controls.”

As stewards of these fragile edges, designers and developers are learning from the past and moving away from over development toward regenerative, adaptive approaches. “The most successful waterfronts don’t just hold back water – they embrace fluctuation and incorporate resilient infrastructure that is both functional and

Navy Pier District | San Juan, Puerto Rico

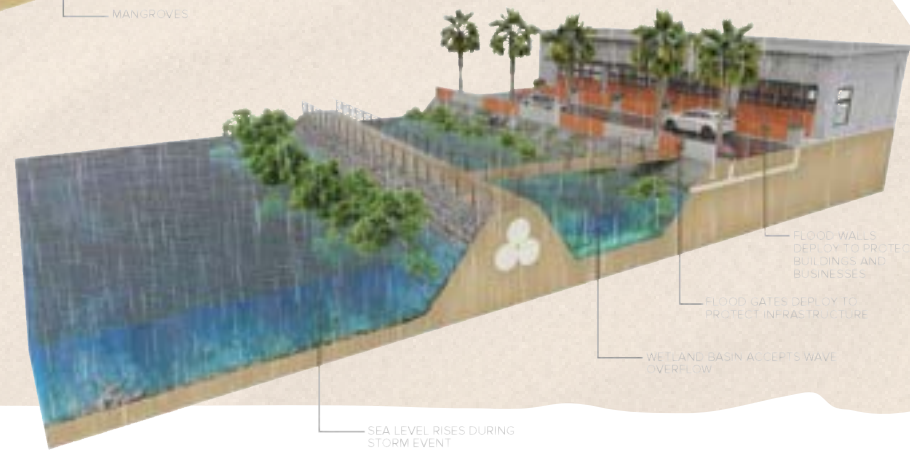


RESILIENCY IN PRACTICE

Typical Condition



Storm Condition



BRICKELL BACK BAY | MIAMI, FLORIDA

“Waterfronts are the front porches to civic life and must simultaneously manage rising seas, restore biodiversity, foster community, and drive investment.” — Lianying Wang

beautiful,” states Massari. This balance is especially critical in high-demand markets and coastal regions facing mounting climate risks. Here, designers act as translators – bridging the needs of ecology and economy to ensure the waterfront remains accessible, adaptive, and enduring.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, this philosophy is taking shape through the transformation of a decommissioned Navy Pier situated between Old San Juan and Condado. “It’s abandoned, but it’s right there – prime real estate,” observes Massari. Long closed to the public, the reimagined mixed-use district will honor its maritime history while introducing housing, transit connections, and civic space. “It’s not about condos with a view,” he explains. “It’s about stitching the site back into the city and creating something that works for everyone.”

That same mindset of reintegration and shared value extends to the natural environment. “There’s always a balance,” notes Suiter. “We don’t have to extract value from nature. We can find value by honoring, restoring, and integrating it.”

In the past, coastal protection often meant rigid solutions like hard seawalls and bulkheads, which can accelerate erosion and degrade ecosystems. Today, the thinking has shifted toward strategies like living shorelines, restored wetlands, and elevated topographies, which safeguard communities while enhancing natural beauty.

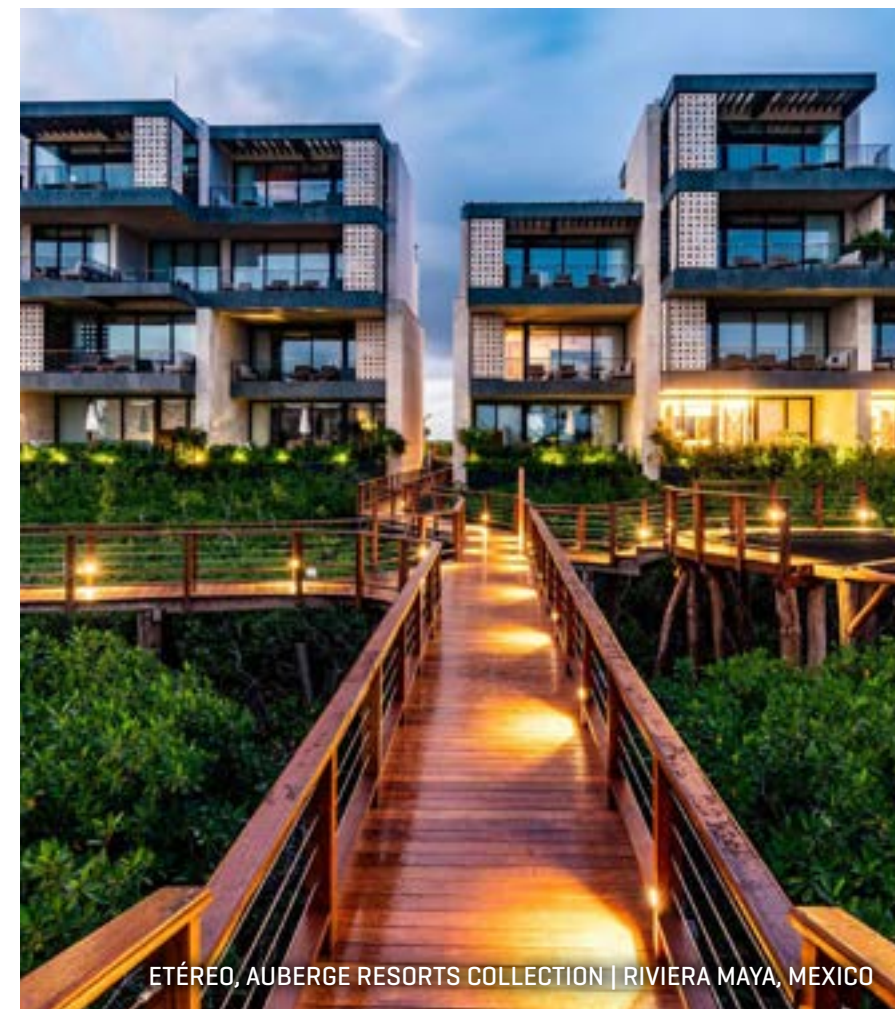
Along the shores of Key Biscayne’s Back Bay, EDSA teamed up with engineers to rethink coastal protection – favoring living systems over concrete barriers. The proposed design replaces hard infrastructure with oyster reefs, mangroves, and marsh grasses. These natural buffers absorb storm surges, filter water, and nurture biodiversity. At the street level, bioswales and greenways manage runoff and reduce inland flooding, forming a multi-layered system that grows stronger as the ecosystem regenerates. “Mother Nature always wins. So when we design with her, we don’t just restore balance, we build resilience that endures,” shares Suiter.

Culture of Possibility

The future of waterfront design calls for an integrated approach that brings together diverse disciplines and voices. “Success hinges on aligning city agencies, developers, designers, engineers, and communities around a common vision,” suggests Wang. “I hope we start seeing waterfronts not just as valuable real estate, but as essential public infrastructure like libraries or transit – places that belong to everyone and help heal both the land and the community.” This transition is already underway. In Baltimore, floating wetlands are cleaning urban runoff while creating vital habitat. Elsewhere ferry districts are blending mobility with civic space, and restored mangroves are buffering coastlines while boosting biodiversity.



SOLARE MISR | ITALIA | RAS EL HEKMA, EGYPT



ETÉREO, AUBERGE RESORTS COLLECTION | RIVIERA MAYA, MEXICO

In resort destinations like Rosewood Mayakoba and Etéreo, Auberge Resorts Collection in Mexico, lagoon-edge boardwalks, over water villas, and wellness activities blur the lines between comfort and conservation – allowing natural systems to serve as amenities. And in cities across the US, carefully planned communities are integrating flood-conscious landscapes, view corridors, and public access that reconnect everyday life with the ecological richness of the shoreline.

While these examples signal a broader transformation for waterfronts as multifunctional, resilient spaces, developers must resist the urge to impose fixed solutions and instead listen closely to the site, the climate, and the community.

Wang shares. “Our role is to look for flexibility, humility, and empathy – to dig deeper into the psychological and environmental narrative of how people experience and engage with the water.” Ultimately, to design at the water’s edge is to design for the future. “These projects are opportunities to reimagine how we live, connect, and care for the world around us,” she concludes. ■



Design Impact

A plaza that stays cool beneath the desert sun, like the shaded courtyards of Qiddiya. Pathways that drain effortlessly after a mountain storm, like those at Gore Creek Promenade. A conservation shaped destination where every step immerses guests in nature's sanctuary, like Naviva®, A Four Seasons Resort.

You know it when you feel it — that quiet harmony between place and person. Shade falls where it's needed, water finds its way home, and every corner seems to breathe with welcome.

Today's most impactful design is defined by its staying power – the ability to nurture ecological health, support long-term viability, and foster social connection over time. According to Doug Smith, a Principal at EDSA, "Design isn't passive. It is a catalyst for the future where nature, communities, systems, and economies evolve together." In this way, design becomes more than a response to change. It becomes a tool to navigate and shape it.

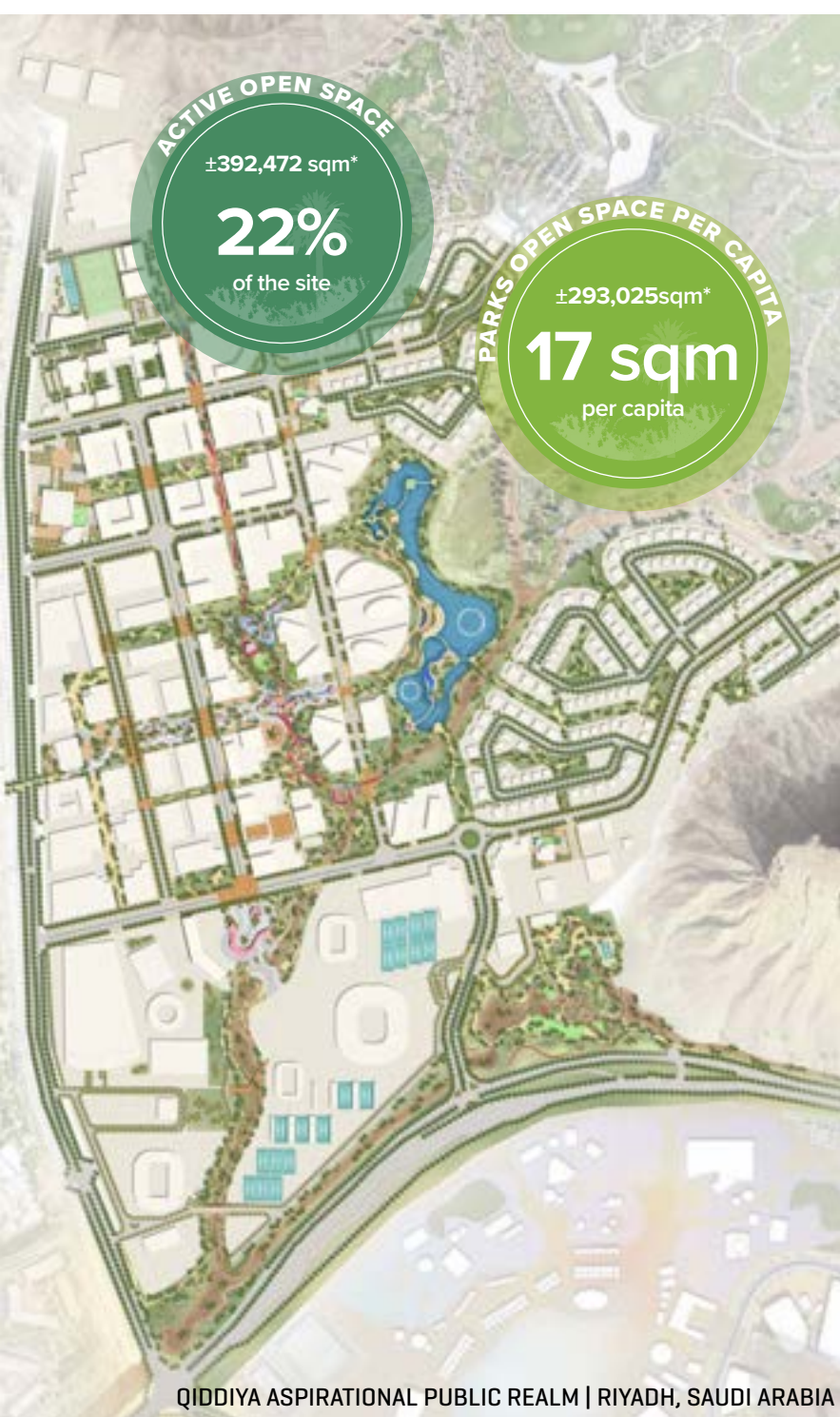
“Faced with erosion challenges and development limits, every move had to be deliberate.”



OUTRIGGER KA'ANAPALI BEACH RESORT | LAHAINA, HAWAII

“We were very thoughtful about what stayed, what changed, and how to fit robust programming within the five-acre footprint.”

— Amy Harbert



Innovation Reframed

“Great design is about solving problems and shaping possibilities,” shares Brent Lloyd, EDSA Principal. “It’s layering stories and systems that are not only functional but resonate with the people who engage with them.” By uniting narrative with performance, design fosters resilience – not just as a protective response, but as part of a project’s originating DNA. From this foundation, places that inspire connection, enrich daily life, and strengthen the vitality of the environment they inhabit emerge.

That sentiment of empathy and accountability helped guide renovations at the Outrigger Ka’anapali Resort in Lahaina. “Faced with erosion challenges and development limits, every move had to be deliberate,” explains Amy Harbert, a Vice President at EDSA. “We were very thoughtful about what stayed, what changed, and how to fit robust programming within the five-acre footprint.” This meant leaving parts of the land untouched and infusing meaning into the smallest details. “It was about making protection part of the narrative and infrastructure integral to the experience.”

Harbert continues, “By embedding regenerative thinking into the baseline of design, we shifted the conversation from defensive to adaptive, from protective to proactive. Rather than asking how the space can endure, we asked how it could provide ecological wellbeing as conditions changed.” In this new paradigm, design became a living process – creating spaces where guests’ experiences are enriched and in harmony with the vitality of the environment.

Macro Shifts

Five, ten, fifteen years ago, sustainable design centered around native plants and efficient irrigation – important practices, but long-standing staples in a landscape architect’s toolkit. Today’s conversations are expanded. “Just as our climate has changed, so too has expectations,” asserts Smith. “With site-specific analysis, material lifecycle assessments, and predictive modeling, we can make more informed decisions about energy use, stormwater management, habitat restoration, and thermal comfort – designing interventions that are purposeful and measurable.”

Driving impact across scales and geographies, this shift moves from check-the-box strategies to innovative solutions in which equity and environmental performance are not just considerations but often required for approvals and financing. By embedding resilient measures into every project, design

moves beyond compliance to contextually responsive. For example, in Saudi Arabia, open space is being redefined not only as an amenity, but as essential cultural infrastructure. Parks, promenades, trails, and gardens have become markers for civic identity, social transformation, and ecological well-being. Smith elaborates, “Passive ventilation, shaded walkways, and native-adapted planting are integrated alongside cultural storytelling to create a vibrant public life.”

Reflecting a deeper truth, impactful design is locally attuned and pliable to continuously changing environmental pressures and human needs. “You can’t copy-paste design,” says Lloyd. “What works in the Gulf won’t translate to the Rockies. There is no universal template, only a shared responsibility to listen to the land, plan intelligently, and design for the character of a place.”



Multiple Bottom Lines

At the heart of today’s design movement is intentionality – a desire to enhance quality of life while reducing environmental harm. With this philosophy, constraints are instigators for pushing the boundaries of what’s possible and unlocking solutions that wouldn’t exist without them. “Constraints sharpen our thinking,” says Lloyd. “They force us to innovate in ways that make places more resilient, more human, and more enduring.”

By embracing constraints as catalysts, design evolves into a strategic tool that links experience, environment, and investment. “It’s a holistic equation where design, ecology, and economics reinforce one another,” notes Lloyd. Atlantis, Paradise Island, Bahamas is a natural case study in large-scale placemaking, where the landscape is more than a backdrop. It acts as a natural buffer, a climate adaptation zone, and a key contributor to the destination’s value. “In doing so, the design serves to protect the environment, enrich guests’ experiences, and generate prolonged value for the surrounding communities and the resort operator.”

At Gore Creek in Vail, Colorado, EDSA is transforming fragmented trails and degraded edges into resilient, people-friendly spaces. Balancing private land with public access, the team is restoring native habitats, integrating floodable landscapes, and weaving in trails that turn overlooked areas into shared community assets. Details like sun pockets for winter use, riparian buffers that stabilize creek banks, and intuitive wayfinding for deeper exploration of the park help revitalize the creek district and strengthen Vail’s appeal as a dynamic, year-round recreation hub.

These interventions show how outdoor spaces can actively respond to human activity, ecological systems, and shifting seasonal conditions. Such design moves illustrate a larger philosophy that Harbert champions – the idea that outdoor spaces should do more than one thing at a time. “When outdoor spaces serve overlapping functions, they stop being static amenities and become dynamic assets.” A shade tree can reduce heat, define a gathering space, and increase adjacent property value. A well-graded plaza can manage stormwater, improve walkability, and host community events. Even bioswales can double as interactive play areas. These scenarios exemplify a visionary approach where design delivers real value by allowing spaces to flex and respond to changing use patterns, environmental pressures, and social needs.

Harbert references Pier Sixty-Six in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. “Before the recent renovation, a narrow, heat-absorbing corridor offered minimal ecological or pedestrian value. Today, that same stretch serves as a welcoming, multi-functional streetscape. Expanded sidewalks allows multiple users to stroll side by side with greater comfort and accessibility. Layered plantings introduce shade and texture while enhancing biodiversity. And most importantly, the corridor not only connects destinations – but people. There are opportunities for interaction, for chance encounters, for community.”

“Constraints sharpen our thinking. They force us to innovate in ways that make places more resilient, more human, and more enduring.”

— Brent Lloyd



PIER SIXTY-SIX | FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA



GORE CREEK PROMENADE | VAIL, COLORADO

Accelerated Insights

Lasting design is the result of informed decisions made early. Grounding bold ideas in real-time data, long-term performance, and community insights, new tools are helping designers be more efficient and effective. From AI to parametric modeling, these advancements are raising the bar – not as a replacement for creativity, but by sharpening its aim.

With programs like Autodesk Forma and geospatial data, designers are performing detailed assessments of wind and shade patterns, thermal comfort, storm surge, solar exposure, and water use in detail. They’re also simulating user movement, forecasting maintenance costs, and testing decisions long before a site is touched. “We can predict what a space will feel like on a Friday afternoon in July, and how a tree canopy might change that experience,” shares Lloyd. “Are we at the peak of what’s possible? No, but we’re doing more now than we ever have.”

“It’s really about what the tools allow us to ask,” explains Smith. Designers are using digital intellect to amplify analysis and expedite data collection. “But technology doesn’t negate human intuition and creative interpretation. It’s still up to us to decide what should and can happen. That’s the difference between smart and wise.”

Take the redevelopment of Haitang Bay in China. Positioned at the intersection of rising seas and vibrant tourism, the project demanded anticipatory thinking. Using predictive modeling and AI-driven climate tools, the team was able to visualize seasonal flood risk, simulate pedestrian movement, and identify optimal locations for shade-responsive planting. These insights led to the integration of terraced wetlands and elevated pathways that not only protect the shoreline but enrich the visitor experience. By aligning data with insight and on-the-ground observation, the waterfront is evolving into a dynamic ecological corridor.

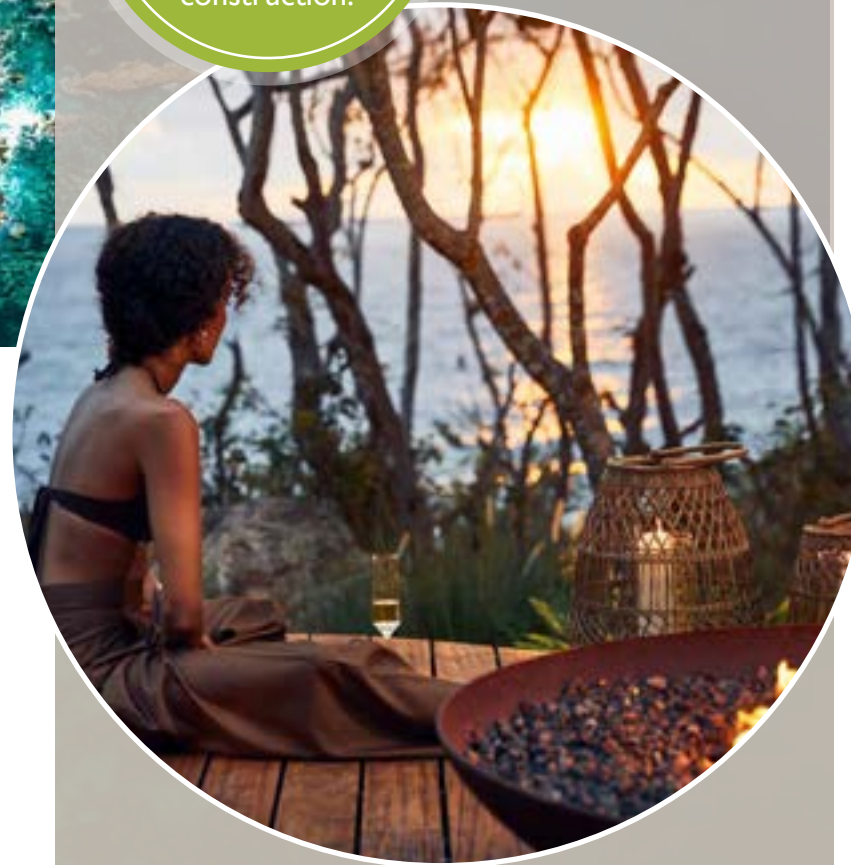


NAVIVA®, A FOUR SEASONS RESORT | PUNTA MITA, MEXICO

Reduced surface runoff by **15%** through utilization of permeable pavement.

68% less energy use and **80%** reduction in irrigation needs compared to a typical resort.

97% of the tropical forest ecosystem was preserved during resort construction.



Performance-Based Design

Still, talking the talk is easier than walking the walk – but the gap between aspiration and implementation is closing. True innovation emerges not from gadgets, but from rethinking how people experience a place.

By balancing intuition with measurable outcomes, development strategies move from obligation to the natural outcomes of thoughtful design. It's here that innovation reveals its truest form. "It's a process that begins with listening to the land and its people until the needs reveal themselves and the data becomes an ally for deliberate, positive impact," suggests Smith.

At Naviva®, A Four Seasons Resort in Punta Mita, a light-touch approach heightens guest comfort while preserving the land. Barefoot luxury emerges via thoughtfully placed tents that capture natural ventilation while locally sourced materials immerse visitors in the Mexican culture. Beyond the guest-facing elements, the landscape itself embodies another layer of strategy. For example, naturally contoured footpaths guide movement, filter rainwater back into the soil, and reduce erosion.

According to the LAF Case Study, the resort's passive strategies, adaptive systems, and solar alignment result in 68% less energy use and an 80% reduction in irrigation needs compared to a typical resort. Guests may never notice the calibrated airflow or solar orientation, but they certainly feel the difference.

"Design isn't passive. It is a catalyst for the future where nature, communities, systems, and economies evolve together." — Doug Smith

A Changing Planet

"Landscape architecture is unlike other disciplines when it comes to longevity," observes Lloyd. "Our spaces must function for 20, 30, 40 even 50 years after design implementation." Designing for that timespan calls for foresight and a systems-level understanding of an environment in flux. Looking decades ahead, designers must anticipate pressures that will shape a site, such as resource scarcity, wildfire risk, and ecological volatility. "These realities are prompting designers to think more strategically and adaptively."

In Port Aransas, Texas, years of drought have pushed the community into a water crisis, challenging conventional approaches. In response, the design team is exploring strategies that reduce dependence on potable water with plant palettes attuned to the climate, grading that creates shade and moisture pockets, soils engineered to hold water longer, and irrigation systems that respond intelligently to real-time conditions. "We might not get to zero supplemental irrigation," says Lloyd, "but we can design landscapes that thrive with dramatically less water than traditional models ever imagined."

Similar foresight is driving innovation in wildfire-prone regions, where what was once a temporary hazard is not a constant threat. Designers are rethinking every aspect of the landscape so that beauty and safety go hand in hand. Trees and shrubs are

selected to slow fire, open spaces double as defensible buffers, and materials are selected as much for durability as for their aesthetic appeal. "These aren't surface-level adjustments," Lloyd emphasizes. "They're proactive measures shaped by an evolving reality."

And along coastlines, the conversation shifts yet again. Rising seas and climate conditions are redrawing boundaries between land and water – forcing communities to reconsider not just how and where they build but why. In South Florida, responses include green infrastructure, permeable surfaces, elevated walkways, and even managed retreat.

For Smith, these interventions reflect a broader mindset: "Every site is an opportunity to make a difference. The notion that individual efforts don't matter is simply false. True impact comes from cumulative action and a steadfast 'do no harm' approach that prioritizes long-term sustainability over fleeting gains."

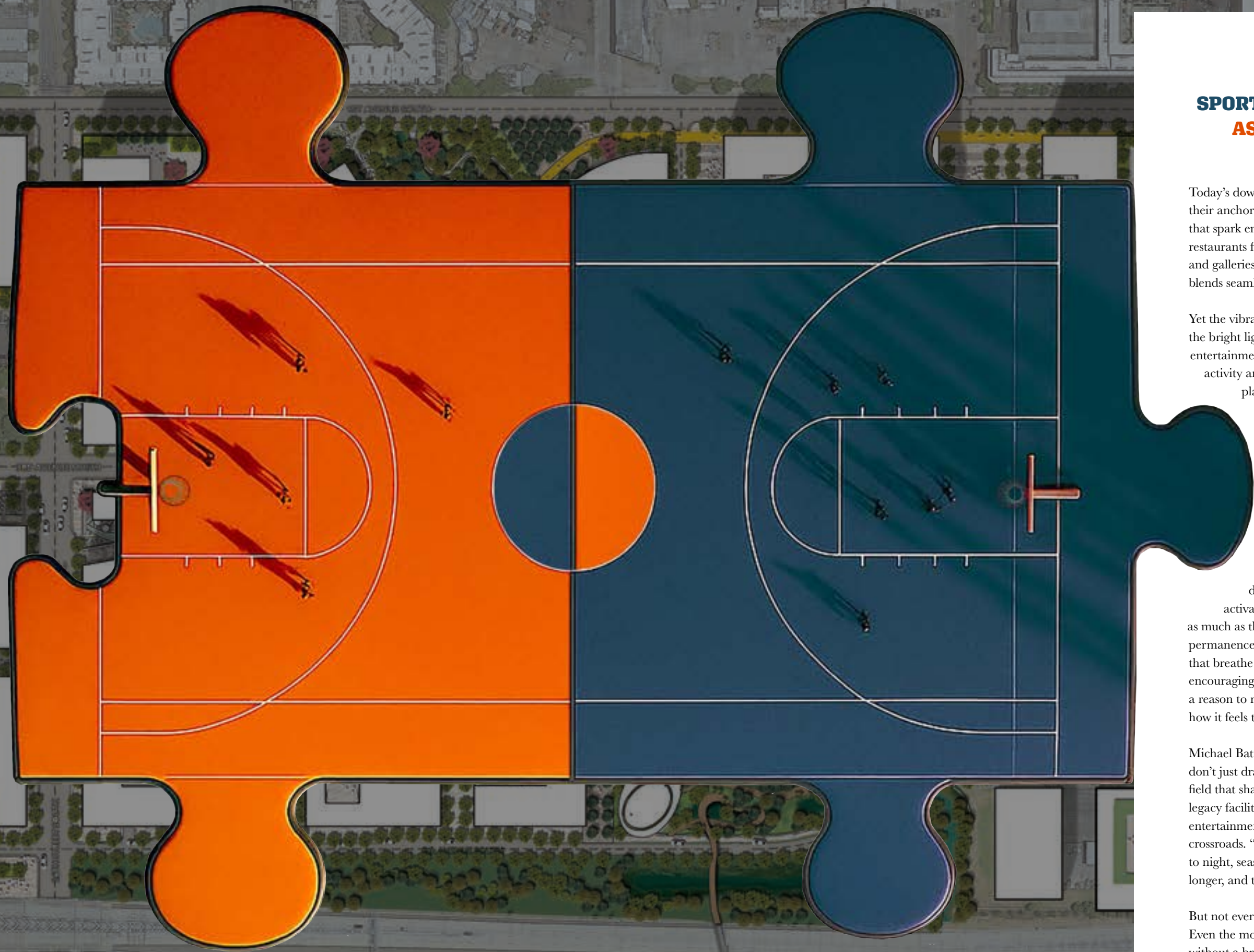
A sentiment echoed by Harbert, "We all have a responsibility to do better. Understand that every choice ripples outward – shaping the environment, the economy, and the social fabric. We must hold ourselves accountable for the long arc of impact."

That sense of accountability, Lloyd adds, must be matched with ambition. "We're finally in a place where expectations equate to aspirations. Now it's up to us to deliver." ■



HAITANG BAY WATERFRONT | SANYA, CHINA

GAME CHANGERS



SPORTS + ENTERTAINMENT AS URBAN ANCHORS

Today's downtown districts pulse with energy around their anchors – stadiums, arenas, and cultural venues that spark entire urban ecosystems into motion. Nearby, restaurants fill with fans, plazas echo with music, shops and galleries extend the experience, and everyday life blends seamlessly with spectacle.

Yet the vibrancy of these districts must extend beyond the bright lights and headline acts. While sports and entertainment venues set the stage, it's the layering of activity and daily rituals that transforms a gathering place into a living destination. It emerges from connective spaces – plazas where strangers strike up conversations, streets where cultures intersect, and corners where everyday life takes root.

Such richness doesn't happen by accident. "We're seeing a rethink on how cities view public space," says Laura Reyes, a Vice President with EDSA. Her insights reflect a broader design philosophy that values flexibility, activation, and the in-between moments just as much as the main event. "Design is less about permanence and more about possibility with spaces that breathe and adapt with the times. It's about encouraging mixed-use development and giving people a reason to return – not just for what happens, but for how it feels to be there."

Michael Batts, EDSA Principal agrees. "Great venues don't just draw crowds – they create a gravitational field that shapes a sense of place." Where many legacy facilities focused on arrivals and exits, today's entertainment anchors are part of the city's everyday crossroads. "Extending the experience from morning to night, season to season – guests arrive early, linger longer, and the district itself becomes an attraction."

But not every district achieves this kind of magnetism. Even the most high-profile investments can fall short without a broader vision. Iconic venues, when isolated from their surroundings, risk leaving behind little more than empty sidewalks and traffic snarls. The real game changer comes when design flips that script – putting community, context, and the long view at the center.



BALLPARK OF THE PALM BEACHES | WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA



PATRIOT PLAZA | TOWSON, MARYLAND

THE ART OF THE IN-BETWEEN



DUBAI OPERA DISTRICT | DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The real test isn't what happens when the crowd roars – it's what happens when no one's keeping score. "We always study how a space guides and operates on a typical day versus an event day," advises Reyes. In practice, that means creating circulation routes that feel inviting and scale effortlessly. She suggests, "When solid infrastructure like Wi-Fi connectivity, mobility, and safety systems are paired with public amenities and spaces of comfort, a plaza can become a destination rather than a pass-through."

Dubai Opera House is masterful at activating a venue beyond scheduled performances. The district unfolds around multi-level paving, dynamic water elements, and a pedestrian experience that encourages lingering while retail and dining spots pulse with activity whether a show is planned or not. The adjacent park further activates the area, ensuring the district remains lively and accessible all year round.

That same placemaking philosophy permeates EDSA's entire portfolio. At the Kennedy Center in DC and Patriots Plaza in Maryland outdoor spaces extend the cultural experience beyond the theater walls, creating civic living rooms where art and community intersect. In Texas, the new National Juneteenth Museum is blending education and commemoration with shaded courtyards, gathering greens, and social connection that invite dialogue across generations.

In the end, successful public realms aren't defined by marquee moments. They thrive in quieter times – the spontaneous conversations and simple pleasures that knit people to place.

PROGRAMMING PUBLIC LIFE

"Modern venues are designed for more than big moments," says Jeff Sugar, EDSA Principal. "It's about curating ever present experiences, relatable activities, and the kind of guest engagement you see at places like Disney or Universal. The goal is to engage people in exploration, give them something new to discover, and create opportunities that bring them back for more."

City centers with diverse, year-round programming see up to a 30% boost in local business revenue and significantly higher resident satisfaction. Places like Wrigleyville in Chicago or the neighborhoods surrounding Premier League stadiums such as Anfield in Liverpool, Old Trafford in Manchester, and Stamford Bridge in London – show how sports anchors help drive economic growth. Far from being spillover zones, they've evolved into extensions of the cities themselves – alive with an energy that sustains the community well beyond game day.

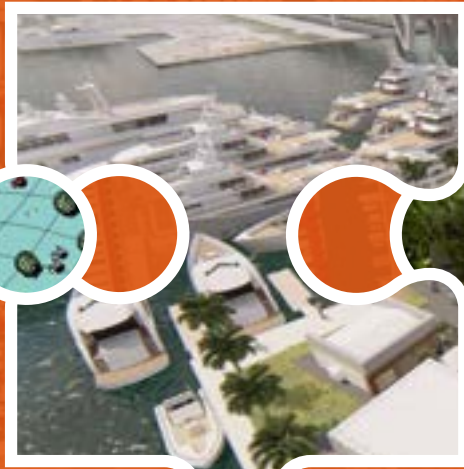
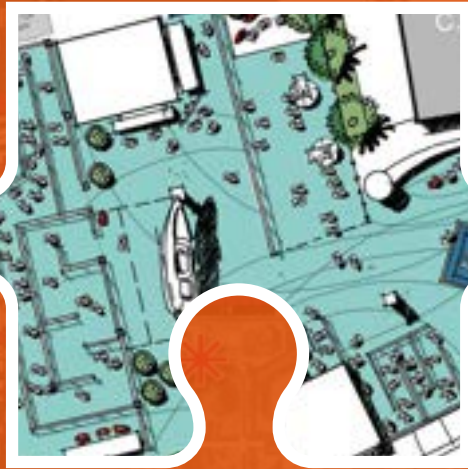
At the heart of this transformation is a design that adapts to the community's needs. A plaza might be a quiet lunchtime retreat in spring, an open-air stage in summer, and a glowing winter market in December. To make that possible, design elements like

movable seating, flexible lighting, and multi-use spaces allow areas to change with the events they host – food trucks one week, art installations the next. Over time, these spaces become a familiar piece of the community fabric.

The Ballpark of the Palm Beaches demonstrates this mindset in action. Envisioned as a year-round destination, the 6,500-seat stadium is complemented by palm-lined streets, water features, and open plazas that welcome visitors as easily on a quiet weekday as on a game day. Beyond spring training, the campus is a stage for festivals, corporate gatherings, and community celebrations. A connected city park expands the experience with a playground, splash pad, basketball courts, and a 1.8-mile walking trail ensuring the site always remains inclusive and valuable to residents.

This blending of recreation, events, and everyday activity reveals the underlying driver of lasting appeal. According to Batts, the hidden lever behind success is activation. "Even the best-designed spaces need a calendar to drive engagement and a strategy to make it meaningful." Whether it's a farmers' market, concert series, or seasonal pop-ups, every activity reinforces excitement and connection.

"PUBLIC SPACES ARE KEY PLAYERS IN THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY. WHEN PROPERLY DESIGNED, PEOPLE STAY LONGER, EXPLORE MORE DEEPLY, AND COME BACK REGULARLY." — Michael Batts



INTERNATIONAL BOAT SHOW | FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

SCALING THE PUBLIC REALM

At first glance, a modern sports arena's primary function appears straightforward – host 40 basketball games, a few concerts, and the occasional playoff series. But designing flagship venues isn't just about capacity. It's about choreography. As Sugar explains, "This is where the real creativity begins. The surrounding public realm – streets, plazas, and promenades must do double duty. They must scale up for crowds and security while also scaling down to offer intimate, human-centric spaces.

Each year, for five consecutive days, the Fort Lauderdale International Boat Show transforms the public waterfront into a global stage for 100,000 attendees and 1,000 exhibitors. Adaptable street cross-sections, layered circulation, strategic bollard placement, modular structures, and layered planting accommodate crowds without compromising intimacy. Wide walkways shift from quiet promenades to busy corridors, while shade trees and seating create welcoming micro-moments. Event logistics are carefully balanced with a sensitivity to the site's everyday character and function.

While the Boat Show activates the waterfront with temporary energy, the Jacksonville Jaguars' stadium embodies a permanent vision of year-round engagement. From active green spaces and waterfront trails to retail, dining, and cultural programming, the 'Stadium of the Future' offers visitors a variety of experiences.

Expanding the venue's role, hardscape zones flex between large-scale events and intimate moments while tree canopies, movable seating, and integrated stormwater strategies invite comfort, sustainability, and spontaneity. Rather than isolating, the design integrates the stadium into the urban fabric with connections to transit, adjacent neighborhoods, and the waterfront.

"It's about making the space relevant before, during, and long after the crowds are gone," explains Sugar. A 70-foot-wide corridor can funnel fans quickly in and out of a venue on event days and feel like a shaded promenade dotted with food, art, and activity every other day – a sharp contrast to venues surrounded by a sea of parking, miles from downtown.

"THE PUBLIC REALM MUST DO DOUBLE DUTY, SCALING UP FOR CROWDS AND SECURITY WHILE ALSO SCALING DOWN TO OFFER INTIMATE, HUMAN-CENTRIC SPACES." – Jeff Sugar

JACKSONVILLE JAGUARS STADIUM | JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA

HOSPITALITY AT THE HEART

As cities compete for talent and cultural capital, the visitor experience has become central to placemaking. "There's a hospitality sensibility that's deeply valuable in public space design," shares Batts. "One of the most valuable lessons learned from the tourism industry is the need to reduce friction. In hotels, that means intuitive arrivals and seamless transitions. In public spaces, it's about clarity of movement, sensory calm, and design elements that make people want to linger. These seemingly small details are what elevate a place to stay-worthy."

This is especially critical in entertainment-led districts where visitors are often experiencing a space for the first time. Bluewaters Dubai, a reclaimed island development, exemplifies this integration of hospitality and urban placemaking. From the seamless transition between hotels and waterfront plazas to the flow between retail shops and residential spaces, every component is designed to support a cohesive and welcoming environment. Shaded seating, curated food offerings, cultural activations, and intuitive pedestrian pathways work together to accommodate large-scale events while also inviting restorative moments.

Likewise, for Yumafang Eco-Resort City in China, luxury lodging, wellness pavilions, and cultural centers are part of the surrounding public realm for a holistic, immersive experience. Rather than existing as isolated moments, entertainment anchors are embedded within a network of green corridors, communal gathering spaces, and ecological trails that invite exploration. Shaded promenades, water gardens, and locally inspired plazas serve as a connective tissue, ensuring that movement is intuitive, scenic, and enriching. The result is a community where public life, natural systems, and elevated leisure coalesce.

"Public spaces are now key players in the experience economy," says Batts. "When properly designed, they encourage people to stay longer, explore more deeply, and come back regularly." Whether it's a lively plaza buzzing with events, a quiet shaded retreat for relaxation, or an immersive cultural venue inviting curiosity, these spaces support everyday moments of wellness and discovery. "The goal isn't just to attract visitors, but to create environments that resonate – places that stay meaningful and evolve alongside their communities."



BLUEWATERS ISLAND | DUBAI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

“DESIGN IS LESS ABOUT PERMANENCE AND MORE ABOUT POSSIBILITY WITH SPACES THAT BREATHE AND ADAPT WITH THE TIMES.”

— Laura Reyes



DRIVING EXPERIENCE

Urban entertainment districts feel electric – the glow of marquees, the pulse of music, the constant flow of people. On the surface, it all seems spontaneous, like the city comes alive at just the right moment. Yet much of what makes these spaces feel effortless happens behind the scenes.

Research shows that up to 75% of visitors’ satisfaction comes from behind-the-scenes systems they don’t consciously notice. And that’s the point. The less obvious, the better it’s working.

“There’s a layer of invisible infrastructure and back-of-house planning that allows people to simply enjoy themselves,” says Reyes. Behind every smooth flowing crowd are defined service routes, strategically placed security posts, and emergency egress that anticipates movement before it happens. Destinations like The Battery Atlanta or L.A. Live are successful not just because of what’s happening onstage, but because the layout guides thousands without friction.

But keeping crowds moving is only part of it. These places must feel clean, comfortable, and safe – even at their busiest. That means trash is handled before it piles up, lighting sequences shift throughout the night to support mood and visibility, and maintenance teams work off real-time data to prevent problems before they happen.

When all is working well, the district hums. Not in a flashy way but in the quiet sense that everything is under control. It feels natural. Organic. Like the city is just doing its thing. But make no mistake – behind every packed plaza and buzzing street corner are finely tuned logistics keeping things running smoothly so visitors can focus on the moment, not the mechanics.



YUMAFANG ECO-RESORT CITY & COURTYARD | BEIJING, CHINA ▲▶

A NEW PLAYBOOK

Ultimately, the success of an entertainment district isn’t measured only in ticket sales or foot traffic. It’s measured in how well it becomes part of people’s lives. Not just a destination, but a habit – a backdrop for celebration, routine, and memory. And achieving that kind of resonance requires more than good design. It takes stewardship. As Sugar notes, “Great placemaking is never one-size-fits-all. It’s about listening to the land, the culture, the community, and creating something that evolves with them over time.”

That kind of impact doesn’t happen by accident. It’s the result of places being continually cared for, questioned, and reimagined. Lasting impact depends on treating time as a design element, blurring boundaries between special events and everyday life, engaging communities, layering diverse uses, and investing in a quality public realm. These are the real game changers that forward-looking practitioners like EDSA are applying on projects worldwide.

As cities rewrite their own futures, the role of entertainment is shifting – from stand-alone attractions to civic glue. The real opportunity isn’t just building what draws a crowd, but shaping the kinds of places people can grow with, return to, and feel a part of – places that hold meaning, not just moments. The invitation is open for developers and public officials everywhere to rethink the role of entertainment in city-making. When approached thoughtfully, these districts don’t just host events – they create stages for daily life, where neighbors meet, families gather, and communities thrive. ■





A new era of hospitality has arrived – one that honors legacy while fearlessly shaping what’s next. Rooted in nostalgia, yet driven by innovation, this moment calls for design that transcends trends, bringing generations together through experiences that are both timeless and transformative.

Hospitality's Next Frontier

PICTURE THIS... It's 1983. You've just turned 18 and are joining your parents at one of South Florida's iconic hospitality escapes: The Boca Raton. Mizner-inspired fountains, luxury boutiques, fine dining, serene pools – it's everything you imagined as you step into adulthood.

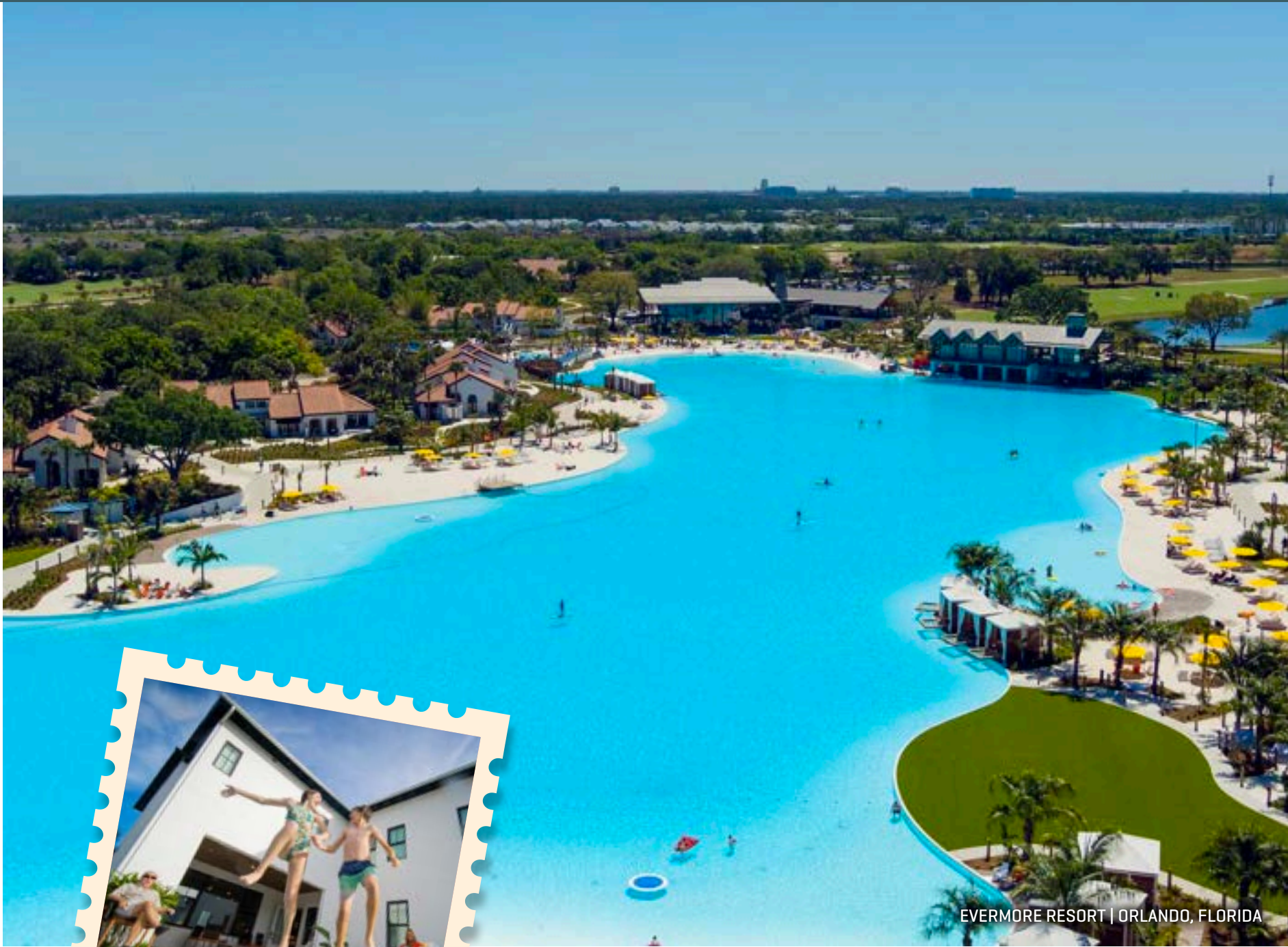
Fast forward to 2025. Now 60, your children and grandchildren surprise you with a family getaway to the same property. As you arrive, the iconic porte cochere, graceful sculptures, and familiar sense of tranquility welcome you back. You wonder how the resort you knew as a young adult will accommodate three generations – until you spot the new kid's zone, a water park, and flexible amenities that are seamlessly woven into the property you've always loved.

Together By Design

Hospitality is an industry that has endured much fluctuation. Yet with the global market expected to surpass \$7 trillion by 2030, the sector continues to thrive, propelled by a growing desire for connection and shared experiences.

“In recent years, society has faced a variety of challenges and divisions, reminding us just how meaningful quality time with loved ones is,” shares EDSA Principal, Derek Gagne. “That said, I recently vacationed with my young daughter and father-in-law, and despite the age differences, we all had an incredible time – and intuitive design is the reason for that.”

With multi-generational travel at an all-time high, everything from aquatic amenities to off-site adventures must cater to visitors of all ages. “You can’t design for just one type of traveler anymore,” says Rob Hutcheson, a Principal at EDSA. “If you want to attract families, you have to think about everyone, from toddlers to retirees.” Splash pads and activity zones for kids, loungers and golf for grandparents, strong Wi-Fi and soundproof booths for working parents – even pet relief stations, “Each attraction and amenity must serve a greater purpose, all while empowering guests to curate their own journeys.”



EVERMORE RESORT | ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Such all-age offerings are central to destinations like the Evermore Resort in Orlando, Florida which reimagines the traditional vacation focus to multi-generational enjoyment. Families can choose to stay on-site at the Conrad hotel, or in an expansive vacation home, flat, or villa – each with access to a tropical beach, entertainment area, and iconic Crystal Lagoon®. In addition, fire pits, cabanas, and lush landscapes provide areas for relaxation, while kayaks, volleyball courts, and a family waterslide tee up opportunities for memory making the entire group can enjoy.

“Fostering spaces of individuality and togetherness, where people can go about their day and eventually come back together, is a new form of luxury,” mentions EDSA Vice President, Gabriela Patocchi. “It’s the quiet moments of solitude that evolve into shared experiences – those layered memories make the hospitality journey truly meaningful.”

Timeless vs. Trend

While the travel industry evolves to meet the needs of a more inclusive and experience-driven audiences, timeless design must remain at the forefront for long-term success. “Today, features like surf lagoons and mega pools are in high demand,” states Hutcheson. “But to stand the test of time, these trending amenities must be thoughtfully integrated into a broader design framework. The goal is to create destinations that resonate and endure.”

That means going beyond current trends and expectations to deliver moments of surprise and delight – offering amenities guests did not initially anticipate. From vibrant retail and dining hubs to open green spaces and flexible programming, these layered activations ensure the guest experience remains engaging, relevant, and future ready. “It’s more than just checking the box with a flashy attraction,” notes Gagne. “It’s about crafting encounters that captivate and remind people why they chose to get away in the first place.”

A BOOMING BUSINESS

HOSPITALITY CONTINUES TO THRIVE



A TRILLION DOLLAR SURGE

The global hospitality market is projected to grow from \$5.71 trillion in 2025 to around \$7.74 trillion by 2030. (AltexSoft)



REVENUE CLIMBING

Revenue per available room (RevPAR) globally is up 15% year-over-year, reaching \$112.50. (DRVN)



TRIPS ON THE REBOUND

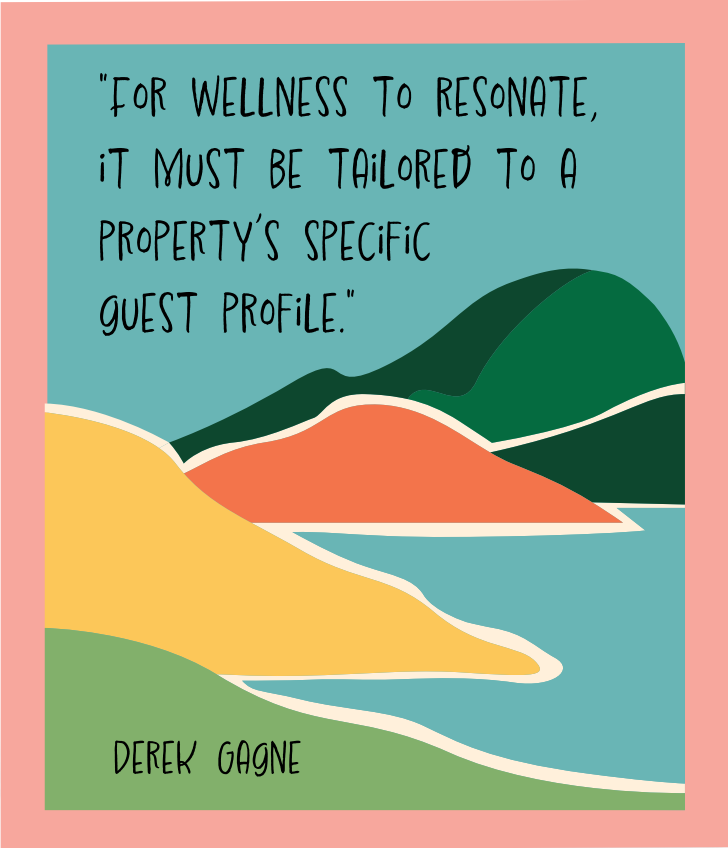
Worldwide, the total number of trips in 2025 is expected to hit 2.61 billion, up from 2.40 billion in 2019, indicating a sustained rebound in travel volume. (TravelPerk)

Take, for example, the Gaylord Rockies Resort and Spa in Aurora, Colorado, a property that recently underwent an \$800 million expansion. Through the addition of an outdoor events pavilion, expanded function spaces, and event lawns that complement the existing Arapahoe Springs Water Park, the resort has seen a notable increase in revenue, occupancy rates, and overall guest satisfaction. “This is just one example of how holistic guest experiences can transcend fleeting trends,” explains Patocchi. “When multi-dimensional amenities are thoughtfully integrated to serve diverse purposes and guest profiles, the result is a destination that remains relevant and in demand.”

Though often, it is not about adding something new but leveraging what already exists for a bigger impact. Patocchi continues, “Before making any recommendations to a client on how to improve their property, we conduct a thorough analysis of the site, its existing assets, the surrounding culture and history, natural systems, and social dynamics,” she explains. “From there, we identify what and where special moments can occur while remaining true to the place.”

At The Westin Beach Resort in the U.S. Virgin Islands, a recent repositioning effort infused the natural beauty of St. Thomas more deeply into the guest experience. Aesthetic enhancements throughout the site echo the island’s essence, fostering a seamless connection between the built environment and its stunning surroundings. In addition, an upgraded arrival sequence, expanded pool deck, and new amenity offerings not only strengthened the resort’s market position, but elevated its sense of place – contributing to increased occupancy and guest satisfaction.

As Hutcheson explains, these design moves go beyond aesthetics. “Every guest is looking for that ‘Instagrammable moment’, but from a design standpoint, it must feel authentic, not staged or gimmicky,” he notes. “Destinations become globally sought-after when visitors are immersed in experiences worth sharing. It’s the organic influence of past visitors – not just traditional marketing that drives a property’s success.”



Buzzword Breakdown

But embracing trends extends beyond site amenities into the very essence of places and people themselves. From Expedia and Vrbo to Tripadvisor and beyond, hospitality brands are rich in insights and forecasts, each offering a unique take on the future of travel. While these perspectives, especially when paired with guest feedback, are undeniably valuable, design is what ultimately determines whether these nuances have lasting impacts or quickly fade away.

As such, travel fads like ‘JOMO’ (the Joy of Missing Out), is gaining momentum with tourists seeking beach destinations that offer leisure, serenity, and a break from the noise. At the same time, APEX Travel is attracting popularity, drawing guests to high-altitude escapes where they can immerse themselves in adventure and rugged landscapes. Not to mention the resurgence of the All-Inclusive Resort, as money-savvy visitors want to cut costs without compromising their experience.

Yet perhaps the most influential movement shaping today’s hospitality landscape is the continued rise of wellness – a trend that shows no signs of slowing. “Wellness means many things to many people,” outlines Gagne. “But for it to genuinely resonate, it must be tailored to the needs and expectations of a property’s specific guest profile.” So, while wellness appears in the form of reflection pods and an outdoor spa at the Four Seasons Resort and Private Residences Okinawa in Japan – where the property focuses on celebrating its global Blue Zone roots, the Hilton Anaheim in California takes a different approach, featuring a redesigned pool and inviting landscapes that foster socialization and cater to visitors of all ages.

“Not everyone is going to spend \$400 on a spa day, but everyone, no matter where they’re staying, wants to leave feeling better than when they arrived,” observes Gagne. “So, whether that’s walkable trails, beachside ping-pong and Jenga, or outdoor yoga, wellness is about offering moments that reset and recharge the mind.”



THE BOCA RATON | BOCA RATON, FLORIDA

Tech Talk

While health and wellbeing held center stage in recent years, technology is quickly emerging as a close contender across the travel sphere. Patocchi comments, “With more than two thirds of all hoteliers already implementing or planning to introduce technology into their property, advancements are reshaping how guests interact and engage – from mobile check-ins and smart rooms to personalized service and seamless digital experiences.”

While guest-facing innovations often capture attention, forward-thinking amenities like the FlowRider at The Boca Raton or the automated sunscreen dispenser at Conrad Evermore are just the beginning. To maximize impact and investment, tech integration must deliver meaningful, behind-the-scenes enhancements.

“It’s less about the novelty of technology and more about how it informs smarter decision-making and better design outcomes,” Gagne points out. Beyond guest-facing features, tools like data capture, 3D modeling, and virtual simulations give designers a deeper understanding of the land, allowing them to approach projects with greater sensitivity. He elaborates, “We can protect natural resources while still meeting, and often exceeding, guest expectations. It’s as much a win for property owners as it is for the surrounding environment.”

Adding another layer to the conversation, Hutcheson emphasizes that the key to integrating technology lies in its subtlety. “Technology should enhance the design – not dominate it. The most effective tech is almost invisible. It streamlines operations, improves flow, and supports guests without ever getting in the way.” That said, wristband tracking, site-wide WiFi and crowd analytics are all subtle, yet effective, ways to heighten the guest journey. “When everything works, visitors can be fully present, and that’s the ultimate goal,” he adds.



Actionable Advice

As the future of hospitality continues to evolve, one thing is certain – it holds exciting potential. But it is up to property owners, hoteliers, and operators, in collaboration with a well-rounded, experienced design team, to stay ahead of the curve. “I’d start by focusing on accessibility and inclusivity,” shares Gagne. “Not just in terms of welcoming guests of all ages and abilities, but in ensuring the property is always open and engaging.”

This mindset guided the revitalization of a legacy resort club on Long Island – a destination once limited to spring and summer, best known for its tennis courts and marina access. “We built upon the site’s historic roots, enhanced its recreational offerings with a mix of traditional tennis, in-demand pickleball courts, and a range of indoor and outdoor wellness-focused activities,” elaborates Gagne. “The result is a year-round resort that honors the club’s history and aligns with the expectations of visitors.”

Building on that idea, Patocchi stresses that a meaningful guest journey is rooted in authenticity. “Experiences must be rich in meaning, in memory, and in the way they connect people to place.” One of the most effective ways to achieve this is by ensuring a hotel or resort is a true reflection of its surroundings. “Are you using local materials? Does the property highlight regional art, culture, and cuisine? Does it evoke a sense of belonging or connection to something greater than oneself? These are the questions that should guide the design. She adds. “Because when a place feels authentic, it becomes unforgettable.” Equally important is designing with the future in mind. As guest

preferences shift, flexibility becomes the true marker of long-term prosperity. Resorts that incorporate open lawns, multi-purpose zones, and versatile gathering areas can pivot seamlessly. Hutcheson further underscores this principle. “Design with the unknown in mind. The greatest amenity you can offer is the ability to adapt. By planning for evolution from the outset, properties can ensure spaces that remain relevant, responsive, and resilient no matter what the future holds.”

And while scale and luxury have their place, Hutcheson finishes by affirming that impact doesn’t require extravagance. “You don’t need the biggest or fanciest resort to make a lasting impact. It’s about being purposeful – designing spaces that are thoughtful, true, and genuinely responsive to the needs of your guests. That’s the real next frontier of hospitality.” □



GOLF, ONCE A SYMBOL OF EXCLUSIVITY AND TRADITION, IS BEING REIMAGINED AS A MORE INCLUSIVE, LIFESTYLE-DRIVEN EXPERIENCE WHERE SMART LAND USE, RECREATION, AND REAL ESTATE VALUE CONVERGE.

Beyond the Fairway

The Quiet Comeback of Golf

With an elite legacy, golf has long been defined by private memberships, sprawling courses, and a business model tied to luxury real estate. But by the early 2000s, the game was losing ground as younger generations viewed the sport as too time consuming and out of sync with their desire for more active forms of leisure. Memberships began to dwindle, courses closed, and the once-booming industry plateaued.

Then came an unexpected catalyst – the COVID-19 virus. As indoor venues shuttered, golf emerged as a safe escape. “People needed to get outside, reset, and golf offered that in a big way,” shares Marc Hall, an EDSA Principal. But revival wasn’t just about the game. “During the pandemic, courses emerged as valued spaces for walking, gathering, and reconnecting with nature. That shift has sustained and changed the way we think about golf today.”

Meanwhile, the sport itself has undergone its own transformation. The days when eighteen holes were essential to sell real estate are long gone. Over-saturation and maintenance costs took their toll – prompting a market correction that has left breathing room for reinvention. “Today’s golf is not just about playing a round,” explains Devon King, a Principal at EDSA. “It’s about the experience. Courses are transitioning from sole sporting venues into broader, more flexible frameworks that allow for less formality, more freedom, and social fun.”

1 Homes in Harmony – Lifestyle Integration

Cluster homes in walkable pods near greens and shared spaces. Avoid ‘wall-to-wall’ fairway frontage. Maintain views and foster neighborhood forms to ensure privacy and safety.



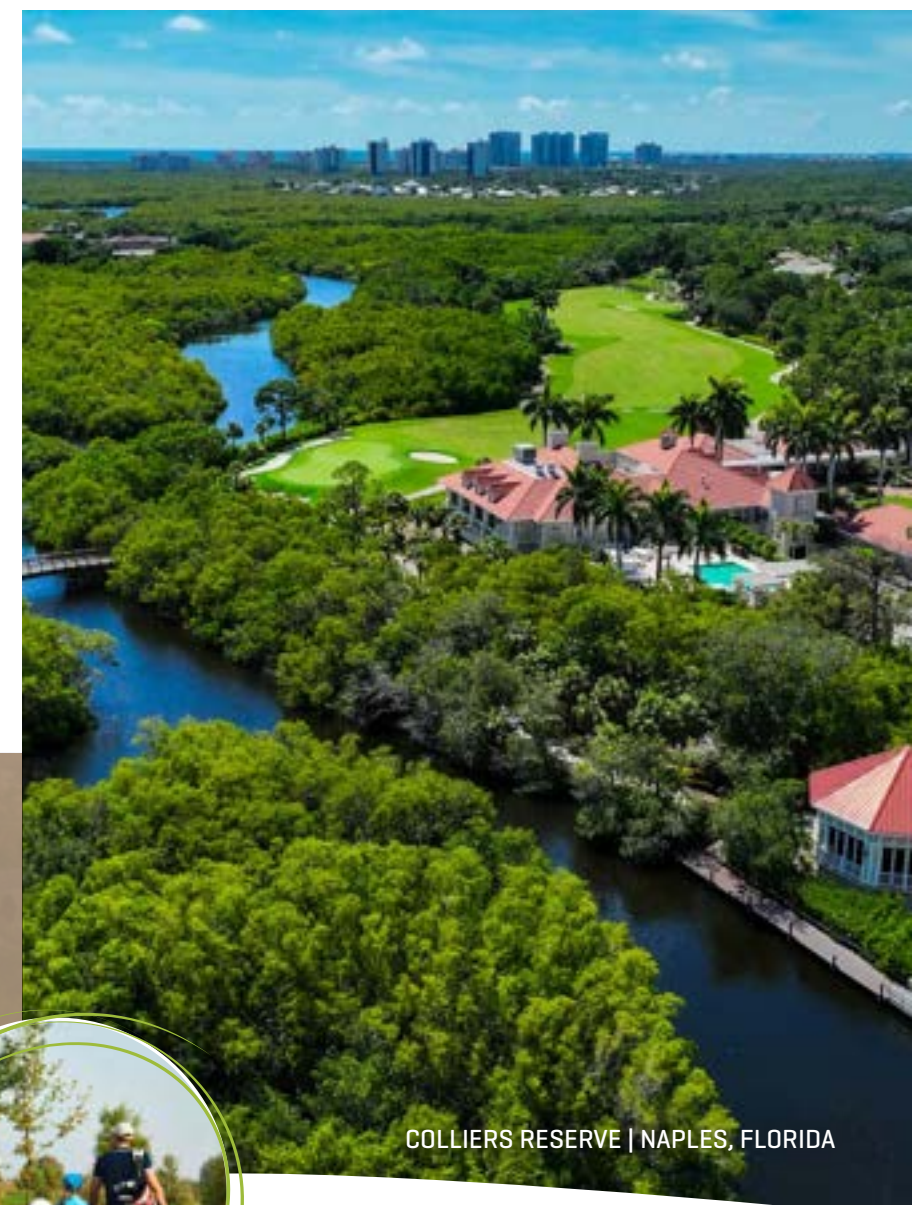
JACK'S BAY CLUB & RESORT COMMUNITY | ELEUTHERA, BAHAMAS

Traditional layouts are being replaced with compact, walkable courses that coexist with parks, trails, and community amenities. It's not just the game that's evolving – it's the land around it. “In this new era, golf isn't shrinking. It's expanding into new territory, making the sport more inviting, efficient, and culturally relevant,” says King. “It's about cultivating a social atmosphere where people come together and enjoy an active, yet relaxing experience.”

This progression reflects a broader trend in placemaking where courses are not seen as isolated but part of the community. “We're designing spaces that are meant for everyone to enjoy,” says Hall, highlighting the challenge of blending areas for serious golfers with those for socializing and family activities. For developers, this broader approach creates opportunities for higher returns and long-term sustainability. “Traditional golf will always have a place, but the real opportunity is thinking beyond peak play. What happens during the shoulder season? That's where the excitement lies.”

2 Clubhouse Central – Anchor Point Destination

Both a visual and social centerpiece, thoughtfully align the clubhouse with access points, parking, and cart staging for smoother arrivals and easy movement to practice areas. Create a neighborhood destination with flexible indoor–outdoor spaces for dining, events, and casual drop-ins that welcome the entire community.



COLLIERS RESERVE | NAPLES, FLORIDA



Golf is transitioning into a multi-dimensional amenity that supports leisure, wellness, and community connection. This evolution is driven by changing lifestyles and the demand for spaces that are as social and inclusive as they are recreational. Designers and developers are moving beyond traditional models, embracing walkable, mixed-use developments where homes, hotels, retail, and recreation coexist.

“Golf is part of a broader lifestyle. We're creating spaces where people can connect, recharge, and stay active. It's about crafting environments that bring people together.”

– Gregg Sutton

From Scorecards to Social Scenes

One of the most noticeable shifts is from a competitive pursuit into a lifestyle offering. Golf environments are for spending time with friends/family and enjoying the game on your own terms. “People are no longer looking to spend four to five hours on a traditional course,” says King. “We're seeing more demand for flexible formats like par-3 courses, shorter loops, modular designs, and even tech-infused driving ranges.”

A Multidimensional Approach

Developers are no longer treating golf as a standalone amenity tucked behind gates. Instead, they are rethinking how it fits into the fabric of broader communities – offering walkable courses with porous edges and multipurpose spaces that invite people in, even if they never pick up a club. The idea is to create enjoyable places for people to visit and experience – from restaurants and spas to trails, outdoor lounges, and even urban farming. These amenities not only activate the space but contribute to the surrounding community and economy.

Imagine stepping onto a trail that winds around open fairways, leading to an outdoor lounge or lively clubhouse that shifts into a social hub at sunset. Greens now double as event lawns for music and food festivals while the surrounding real estate includes traditional homes, hotel-villa hybrids, treehouse stays, or Airbnb-style rentals. Halfway houses are also evolving into ‘convenience houses’, where you can grill lunch or relax with a drink between rounds in a laid-back atmosphere that doesn't require a collared shirt. “It's about doing what you want and just enjoying yourself,” says Sutton.

What's happening is a strategic rethinking of land value, community appeal, and long-term relevance. Multifunctional, inclusive environments now drive activity beyond tee times, meaning golf no longer has to carry the weight alone. “It's part of a bigger, more exciting story – one that fuels real estate, enhances quality of life, and supports a wider range of lifestyles,” suggests Sutton.



3 Play Meets Place – Nature as Framework

Design visually cohesive courses where lakes, trees, and topography form the backbone of the community's green infrastructure. Integrate trails, parks, and pocket plazas that connect shaded walkways and paths to ensure a safe, beautiful, and continuous pedestrian experience.

Flexibility is key to future-proofing golf courses and ensuring their relevance. Across the country, clubs are redefining what golf can be. In Texas, The Nelson Golf & Sports Club is reimagining luxury golf with a vibrant, social core – think fitness terraces, family-forward amenities, and a hospitality edge. And, in South Florida, Orangebrook Golf & Country Club is bringing municipal golf into the future by pairing revitalized play with public green space and mixed-use development.

Yet for all its reinvention, traditional golf isn't fading. It's flourishing, especially in the world of high-end private clubs. Demand is leaning into curated, intimate experiences where the game is personal and the setting is exclusive but never unwelcoming. "Think 'core courses' where holes are clustered for walkability and homes are arranged in thoughtful pods rather than lining every fairway," explains Sutton. Some destinations even cater to fly-in, weekend crowds seeking privacy and escape, complete with their own airstrips. Meanwhile, residential retreats like Bridgesong and Smith Lake are embracing golf as a soft amenity – blending it into a broader outdoor lifestyle that includes hiking, kayaking, and lakeside gatherings for families and friends alike.

The Green Future of Golf

As golf evolves, so too does an emphasis on stewardship. With rising concerns for water usage and land conservation, designers are embracing regenerative strategies that benefit the game and the environment. Replacing traditional mono-culture turf with native grasses, incorporating water-saving irrigation systems, and protecting natural habitats have become central design principles.

"Golf courses are large-scale landscapes, and with that comes an immense responsibility to manage resources wisely."
– Devon King

Newer developments are incorporating biodiversity initiatives, such as wildlife corridors and native plantings that attract pollinators. These efforts not only lessen the ecological impact but enhance the experience. In fact, some courses are now recognized as sanctuaries for local wildlife with carefully planned green spaces that support nature's balance.

SMITH LAKE RESORT | BREMEN, ALABAMA



4 Halfway Houses – Mid-Round Moments

Reimagine halfway houses as open-air lounges or self-serve cafés that act as vibrant social hubs and scenic rest stops – turning mid-round pauses into memorable moments.

A prime illustration is Collier's Reserve in Naples, Florida. The first-ever Audubon International Signature Sanctuary integrates the game into a conservation-first framework. The course layout is routed around wetlands and wildlife corridors, allowing native plantings and habitats to thrive alongside fairways. As a result, species like gopher tortoises and wading birds haven't just been preserved, they've multiplied, proving that golf and biodiversity can coexist.

As the perception of golf moves from indulgent to intentional, the technicalities of design are rising to meet the moment. Advanced irrigation systems, drought-resistant grasses, and water recycling are helping courses reduce their ecological footprint. These practices not only protect the local environment but set a





precedent for responsible course management. “People assume golf is a wasteful use of land. But if it’s done right, it’s incredibly regenerative,” shares Hall.

At the same time, innovations in turf science and site-sensitive planning are redefining what’s possible. “We’re literally engineering turf grass to survive wind, drought, cold, whatever the site demands,” explains Sutton. Showcasing golf as a force for environmental good, new turf varieties adapted to native prairie conditions in Oklahoma,

are helping transform erosion-prone land into a stable, playable surface and in Austin, Texas the course layout is carefully threaded around heritage Live Oaks demonstrating how preservation and play support each other without compromise.

Lifestyle and Leisure

Prioritizing holistic wellbeing, consumers are reshaping golf’s place in the leisure landscape. Rather than standing alone, it is now woven into curated hospitality offerings that balance recreation, relaxation, and connection to nature. For example, at Qiddiya in Saudi Arabia, the course is not just a place to play but an anchor to a more expansive destination where parks, fitness hubs, and cultural attractions create an immersive environment rooted in wellbeing.

At Jack’s Bay in Eleuthera, golf is just the beginning. “People come for the course, but stay for the lifestyle,” says Hall. The property fosters a relaxed, barefoot-friendly atmosphere where the game integrates effortlessly into the island’s laid-back style. Wellness offerings and outdoor activities complement a routing that follows the land’s natural contours, highlighting coastal ridges and native vegetation without extensive alterations. Clustered holes encourage walkability, fairways transition into nature trails, and homes are carefully sited to harmonize with the surroundings.

Delivering that kind of experience takes more than just good intentions – it requires strategic planning and a carefully choreographed sequence of design decisions. “If the logistics don’t work, the magic falls apart,” comments King.

“We’re creating multifaceted retreats where golf, wellness, outdoor exploration, and relaxation come together.” – Marc Hall

Every detail, from circulation to siting, contributes to how the experience unfolds. Cart routes and walking paths aren’t afterthoughts – they shape the flow and enjoyment of the course. The siting of homes and amenities in relation to fairways respects the land’s terrain and protected areas while thoughtful separation of maintenance access ensures operations remain discreet. Even the orientation of holes and placement of halfway houses are considered through the lens of playability and comfort. “It’s all about creating a seamless experience that works just as well behind the scenes as it does on the surface – a balancing act between functionality and feel, where great design solves for both,” comments Hall.

“Golf is more than a game. It’s a catalyst for placemaking, for connection, and for a lifestyle. It’s evolving into a framework for how we design not just courses, but communities where recreation, nature, and everyday living are intertwined,” concludes Sutton. ■

QIDDIYA GOLF RESORT & COMMUNITY | RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA

Field Notes

Key considerations and on-the-ground insights shaping the future of golf environments.

LOOPS
NOT LINES

SHOULDER
SEASON
PROGRAMMING

RECREATION
THAT
RADIATES

NATURE AS A
PARTNER

WHERE

DESIGN

MEETS

PUR

The
EDSA
Difference

POSE

E

**What is design but a prism
– an elegant translation of
complexity into something
beautiful, meaningful, and
intuitively understood.**

It brings clarity where there is confusion, sparks transformation where there is hesitation, and reveals new perspectives, even when distilling the most layered of challenges. The same holds true when applied to a site where design acts as a catalyst – unlocking new possibilities, sparking innovation, and shaping spaces that don’t just respond to their surroundings, but give them a new voice.

This is the lens through which EDSA has approached every project for more than 65 years. Rooted in collaboration, refined through process, and inspired by a profound respect for people and place, this design philosophy continues to guide the firm’s work. It’s not just a methodology – it’s a mindset, woven into the fabric of daily practice and reflected in the way EDSA operates while delivering lasting value to clients and communities around the world.



Collective Creativity

Roughly 50-70 percent of most corporate entities share a similar structure – beginning with a Board of Directors and C-suite executives, and extending through team leaders to project managers and designers. So while EDSA follows a similar framework, the pathways through which design solutions and knowledge flow are far from hierarchical. “There’s not a day that goes by that I don’t learn something new,” shares Chief Operating Officer, Eric Propes. “And that knowledge doesn’t come from just one place – it stems from every level of experience.”

With offices in eight cities across two countries, and teams comprised of talented individuals from around the globe, diversity is at the core of EDSA’s creative process. It’s this range of perspectives that helps capture the true essence of a project. So, while a Principal or Vice President may be sought out for their specialized expertise, it’s just as likely that an top notch designer will offer an insight or solution that moves a project forward. **“We build on each other’s strengths – not through competition, but through true collaboration and collective momentum,” says Propes. “It’s a dynamic that’s rare and incredibly powerful.”**



WORKSHOP | JACKSON HOLE, WYOMING

#1

Human Intelligence

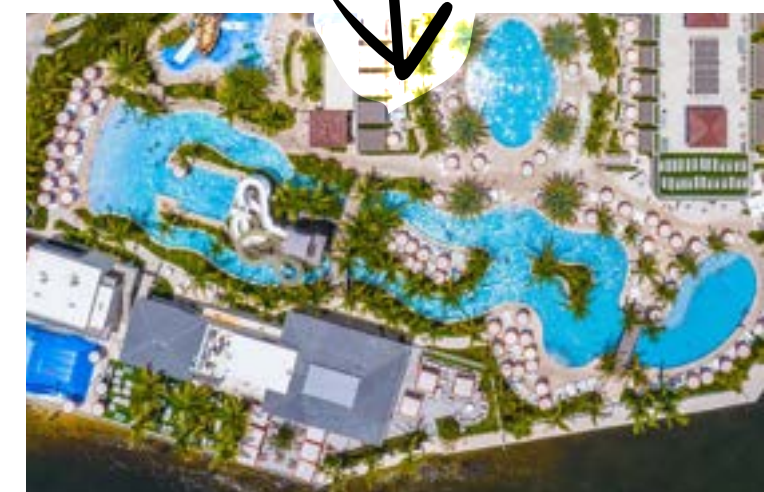
We blend passion with knowledge, art with science + heart with mind, as beauty sits where they collide.

#2

Facilitative

We take a collaborative, comprehensive approach that considers the financial, environmental, social + cultural impacts of a project.

THE BOCA RATON | BOCA RATON, FLORIDA



Design Director and Vice President Betsy Suiter echoes that sentiment, recalling a pivotal moment early in her career: “I remember working on a project with some of the firm’s most influential voices,” she shares. “I was still finding my footing as a landscape architect when one of our senior partners looked at my work and said, ‘That’s it. That’s the design.’”

Such practices are common at EDSA, where teamwork, peer-support, and mutual respect are integrated into the everyday. “There are so many forms of cross-mentorship happening and working together is a big part of that,” emphasizes Vice President, Jagger Javenes. “Knowledge and expectations are passed down, certain skills and insights are passed up, and vice versa. It’s this continuous dialogue and swapping of wisdom that allows us to bridge the generational gap while ensuring we’re all aligned.”

Trust the Process

But collaboration and mentorship extend far beyond the walls of EDSA, reaching into the field itself. “When taking on a new project, we listen closely to our clients while immersing ourselves in what the site and the culture of a place are telling us,” offers Propes. “Our team learns from this context, uncovering the full potential of what a project can become – fueling our creativity and laying the foundation for meaningful design.”

Suiter reinforces that idea, emphasizing that successful designs are those that also factor in the involvement of other disciplines. “It’s not enough for something to look good on our end if it doesn’t work for the rest of the team,” she highlights. “The best outcomes happen when everyone builds on each other’s ideas. That’s what makes a project feel cohesive rather than a quilt that’s just pieced together.”

So, whether partnering with an architect, engineer, owner, developer, or any combination of collaborators, the goal remains constant – to align visions, overcome challenges, and create places that are as purposeful as they are inspiring.

“We examine every project through the same creative, intuitive lens,” reflects Javenes. “Hospitality, residential, themed entertainment, public realm – while the approach may shift slightly to meet a client’s unique goals, it always comes back to one thing: letting the land tell its story.”

The design perspective Javenes describes begins at what EDSA refers to as ‘Phase Zero’ – a foundational project phase that consists of direct engagement with the site in its raw, existing form. Designers immerse themselves in its conditions, character, and untapped potential. From there, the lens widens. “We take a step back to understand not just the site itself, but how it connects to the broader context and role within the community,” continues Javenes. “That’s how we develop a complete vision, one that considers what people need, what nature demands, and what the client is aiming to achieve.”

The result is a thoughtful balance between the desires of the end-users and environment – only to be elevated by an EDSA twist: a layer of design thinking that uncovers opportunities the client may not have initially envisioned. “I always like to start a design with the phrase, ‘It would be cool if...’ and let my imagination build from there,” remarks Suiter. “Often, our ‘blue-sky’ ideas find their way into site programs in ways that are both imaginative and functional. It’s fulfilling to know that the value we add is not only recognized, but often exceeds what clients initially expected from us.”



#4

Experience Creators

We tackle every project through a design lens + offer a holistic perspective that spans from micro to macro and macro to micro.



UNO MARBELLA | MARBELLA, SPAIN

#3

Human Experience

We create relationships between space + place by celebrating cultural context + designing from a sense of perspective.



Tools of the Trade

Still, there is no secret formula or fixed checklist that EDSA relies on to make a space come to life. “Our approach shifts with each project,” states Propes. “What stays consistent though, is our originality. Every design is unique. It’s never cookie-cutter.”

That signature creativity has been further elevated through a thoughtful blend of traditional hand graphics and cutting-edge technology – a combination that brings concepts to life in ways that are both imaginative and deeply grounded in data and context. “What begins as a sketch quickly evolves into a 3D model – a digital twin – allowing us to apply data, AI, and simulation tools to test and refine concepts within the context of the real site,” Propes elaborates. This forward-thinking approach reflects a broader shift across the industry, as 80 percent of leading design firms are now incorporating model-based coordination and AI-assisted visualization into early concept phases – a direction EDSA has long embraced.



Javenes notes that while new technologies offer exciting possibilities, it’s how they’re thoughtfully applied that makes the difference. “There’s no question that AI and BIM have allowed us to bring our ideas to life faster,” he shares. “But there still needs to be a designer asking the right questions or coding the back end to get the correct output. The creativity is still coming directly from the team, and that’s something that will never change.”

And while Suiter agrees that technology has made workflows more efficient and effective, she believes that nothing will ever take the place of traditional hand graphics. “There’s so much power in having a voice with your hand rather than just on the computer,” she affirms. “When we show up on site with a marker and roll of trace ready to sketch, we’re able to showcase what we envision in real time. It adds that ‘wow’ factor and shows our clients that we’re listening, ultimately building long-lasting trust.”



KING SALMAN PARK | RIYADH, SAUDI ARABIA

#5

Problem Solvers

Combining an understanding of the client’s goals with our expertise + research, we develop solutions that cover every aspect of a project.



#7 Future-Shaping

Looking beyond the trends of today, we combine systems thinking and regenerative design – helping create sustainable, resilient + accessible encounters with the natural world.

People Powered

Establishing that trust early on is one of the many reasons EDSA continues to have a majority of repeat clients. While the average client retention rate in professional services hovers around 50 percent, EDSA's repeat work exceeds industry norms at around 75 percent – a testament to long-term dependability, strategic partnerships, and consistently delivered value. “We show up, we execute, and we work well with the teams,” says Javenes. “Our egos are left at the door, and because of that, we’re able to gain mutual respect and build genuine rapport.”

Having worked on more than 200 projects over his 25-year tenure with the firm, Propes affirms that EDSA's consistent, people-first approach is what transforms a single project into a lasting partnership. “It’s about truly understanding the client – getting ahead of their needs and anticipating what comes next,” he explains. “We don’t wait around for direction. We absorb the information, interpret it, and move forward with purpose. That’s how we become more than just the landscape architect – we become an extension of their team.”

At the end of the day, clients choose EDSA not just for design excellence, but for the people behind the work – their energy, devotion, and collaborative spirit. **“We have a team here that’s really dedicated to their craft,” shares Suiter. “It’s more than a job for us. It’s a collection of passion projects. We get invested in each assignment, and we have a genuine interest in getting that project to move forward in a way that feels thoughtful, purposeful, and truly impactful for the people who will experience it.”**

Everlasting Value

But what is a strong project team without successful outcomes to match? At EDSA, ideas are only as powerful as their execution, and that’s where they excel. With hundreds of projects advancing to built form, designs don’t just live on paper – they shape real places, enrich daily experiences, and create spaces that endure long after the ribbon is cut.

“As much as we measure success by metrics like return on investment, economic growth, and energy efficiency, it’s also about how the space makes people feel,” reflects Javenes. “It needs to work for the client financially, but also connect with the community – mentally and emotionally.” And that connection is often driven by personal investment. “I’ve worked on golf-centered communities where I knew the value of a view – not just as a designer but as someone who loves the game.” He adds. “That kind of insight helps shape environments that people genuinely enjoy occupying.”

For Propes, it’s about legacy in the truest sense. “One of my earliest projects was Holiday Park in Fort Lauderdale, and I had the pleasure of watching my kids grow up playing ball there. Nothing is more validating than seeing your family and your community experience the spaces you helped bring to life.”

At its core, EDSA is fueled by passion, precision, and a commitment to growth. It’s a practice rooted in curiosity, guided by empathy, and elevated by innovation – all in service of helping clients realize their vision in ways that are memorable, measurable, and deeply meaningful. ▣



HOLIDAY PARK | FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

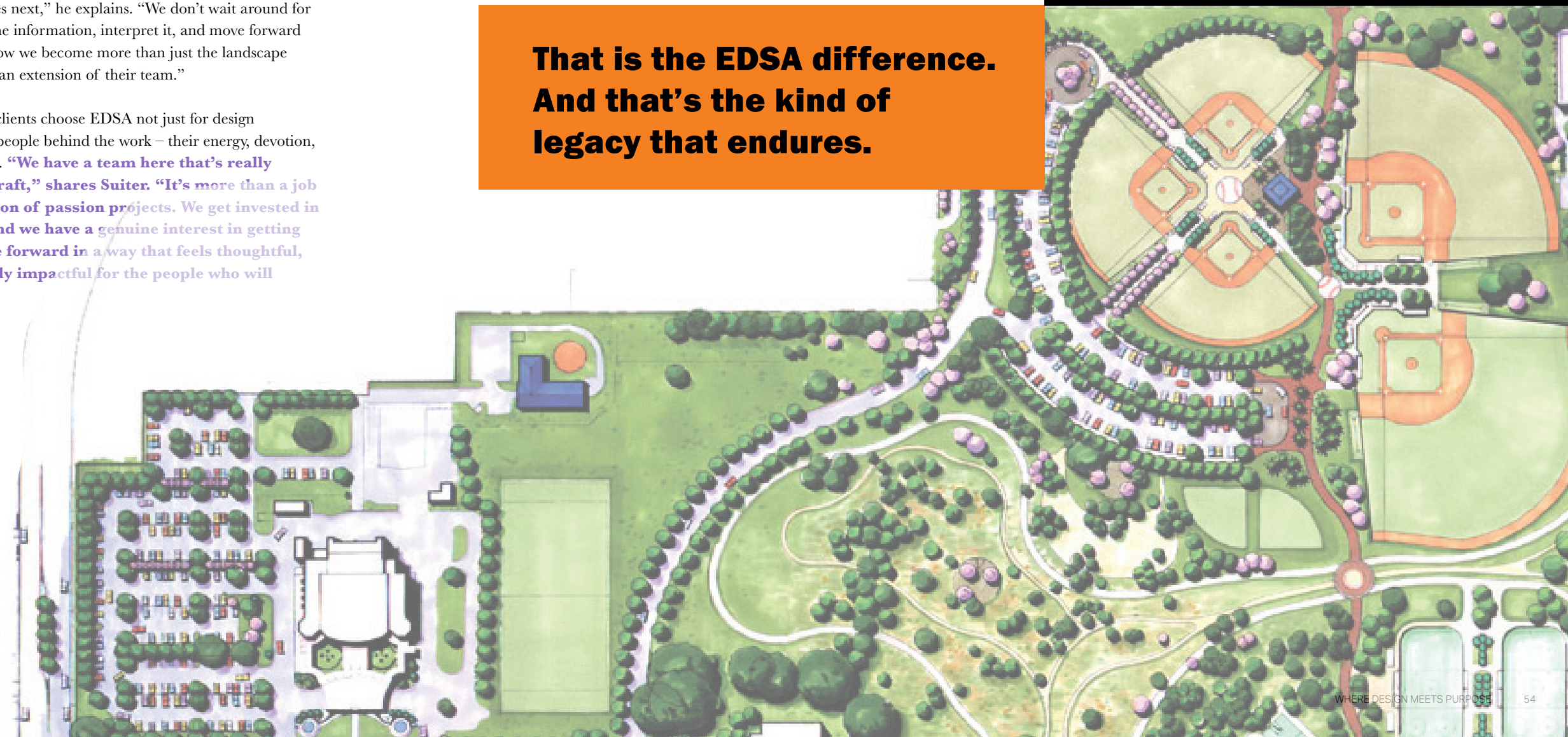
**That is the EDSA difference.
And that’s the kind of
legacy that endures.**

#6 Design Performance

With clear, measurable + quantifiable performance indicators, clients can fully understand social, cultural, economic + environmentally driven project outcomes.



WORKSHOP | PHOENIX, ARIZONA



HARVESTING HERITAGE

Finding Meaning in China's Ancient Tea Forests

For many, tea has long stood as a powerful symbol of harmony, respect, and tradition. Rooted in centuries of history, it has shaped cultural rituals, inspired art and philosophy, and remained a constant presence across cultures worldwide. For Qianqian Zhao, a recent winner of EDSA's Joseph J. Lalli Fellowship, tea carries not just heritage, but special memories of growing up in China.

Raised in Zhenjiang, tea was an everyday ritual. "I can't remember my first cup of tea," Qianqian reflects, "but I do remember that whenever someone came to our home, no matter the hour, my parents would always make tea. It was their way of saying, 'you're welcome here'." At the time, she saw it as a simple act of hospitality – unaware of the rich legacy steeped within each brew. It wasn't until years later, during her fellowship travels to Yunnan, China, that she began to truly understand tea's deeper story – its cultivation, its customs, and its enduring role in bridging people, place, and tradition.



A recent recipient of the Joseph J. Lalli Design Fellowship, **Qianqian Zhao** examines tea as a dynamic intersection of land, culture, and craft – revealing its role in shaping both place and community.

FROM SIPS TO SITES

At first, many were surprised when Qianqian shared that her journey would take her back to a place, and a subject, she already seemed so familiar with. Her response? “As a landscape architect, it’s in my DNA to question the origins of the environments and experiences society often takes for granted – to ask how they came to be and why they matter.” She continues, “I wanted to explore tea not just as something associated with my upbringing, but as a process and a cultural thread that has shaped entire communities. This journey wasn’t about revisiting something I knew – it was about discovering everything I hadn’t yet seen.”

Eager to deepen her connection to a tradition she has always known, yet never fully explored, she set off to Yunnan, China, a region highly regarded as the birthplace of tea. Her journey was personal and purposeful – to explore the roots of tea culture and deepen her appreciation for the craft. In Yunnan, tea is far more than a beverage. It’s a way of life. In fact, the province’s rich landscape and centuries-old cultivation practices have earned it international recognition as The World Tea Origin by the World Tea Association International.

Set amid mist-covered mountains and ancient forests, Yunnan is home to some of the world’s oldest wild tea trees – living legacies for thousands of years. The region’s Pu’er tea, grown in the mountains surrounding the city of the same name, embodies centuries of biodiversity, craftsmanship, and a profound relationship between people and the land.

Adding another layer to the heritage is Jingmai Mountain, one of China’s six famous tea mountains and now a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. Nestled deep within Yunnan’s lush terrain, Jingmai’s ancient groves are living examples of how people and nature have evolved together through centuries of shared cultivation.



Know Your Tea Types



White Tea:
Gently processed, subtle, and naturally sweet.



Yellow Tea:
Rare and lightly fermented, mellow and smooth.



Green Tea:
Unoxidized, fresh, grassy, or floral flavors.



Oolong Tea:
Semi-oxidized, complex flavors between green and black tea.



Black Tea:
Fully oxidized, rich, malty, sometimes sweet.



Pu'er Tea:
Earthy, rich, and complex, improves with age.



Leaf Hierarchy

With tea, every leaf tells a story of quality. The most prized is a single, unopened bud — so rare it takes 50,000 to 60,000 buds to produce just 400 grams of tea. Add one tender young leaf, and the tea is still considered exceptional. A bud with two leaves remains good quality, but is more common. As the leaves mature and multiply, the tea becomes more affordable and perfect for everyday drinking.

BREWING THROUGH TIME

Starting her journey in Pu’er City, Qianqian’s first stop was the Tea Museum – a cultural hub offering a rich introduction to the region’s deep-rooted tea heritage. Inside, exhibits display everything from ancient tea leaves and centuries-old tools used in traditional tea-making, to historical artifacts that trace the evolution of cultivation practices and the trade networks that helped shape Yunnan’s reputation as a global tea capital. For Qianqian, the museum set the stage for the trip while providing a deeper exploration of how landscape, culture, and history intersect through the story of tea.

Her next visit was to a modern tea-picking farm, a striking contrast to the history explained in the museum, but equally impactful in understanding tea’s evolving narrative. Nestled among rolling hills, the farm blended traditional agricultural methods with modern efficiency, using sustainable irrigation and data-driven harvesting techniques. Qianqian observed and contributed to the practice by delicately pulling tea leaves from bushes by hand – a ritual still performed with care despite technological advancements. “Participating in the process in real time made the entire lifecycle of tea feel tangible,” she shares. “The visit highlighted how innovation and heritage coexist, and how today’s farmers are stewards of both economic livelihood and cultural continuity.”



Her last day in the City, Qianqian revisited history by making her way to a section of the Ancient Tea Horse Road, a network of trade routes that once connected Yunnan with Tibet and beyond. Walking along paths once traversed by mule caravans, she gained a visceral understanding of the road's significance in spreading not just tea, but ideas, rituals, and cultural traditions. "It was humbling to realize how far people once traveled, carrying bundles of tea through mountains and forests just to trade," she reflects. The route served as a vital artery for commerce and connection, especially during the Tang Dynasty, when tea was a prized commodity in Tibetan regions. The story of exchanging tea for horses – up to 70 kilograms of tea for a single warhorse, underscored the symbolic value of tea in shaping regional diplomacy and economies.

WHERE TEA TAKES ROOT

At the heart of Qianqian's journey to Yunnan was a desire to immerse herself in the Jingmai Mountain and experience traditional tea making in its purest form. Her curiosity led her to Dapingzhang – one of five cultivated ancient tea forests on the mountain and the only one open to the public.

Spanning over 300 hectares, the sacred landscape is home to over 1 million tea trees, some dating back more than 150 years. At its heart stands the revered Tea Spirit Tree, chosen by the community for its age and vitality. Each spring, villagers gather at its base to offer symbolic gifts and make wishes – a ritual meant to protect the forest and ensure a fruitful harvest. "Standing beneath it, I could feel how deeply tea is woven into life here," Qianqian shared. "It's not just agriculture, it's a relationship with the land."

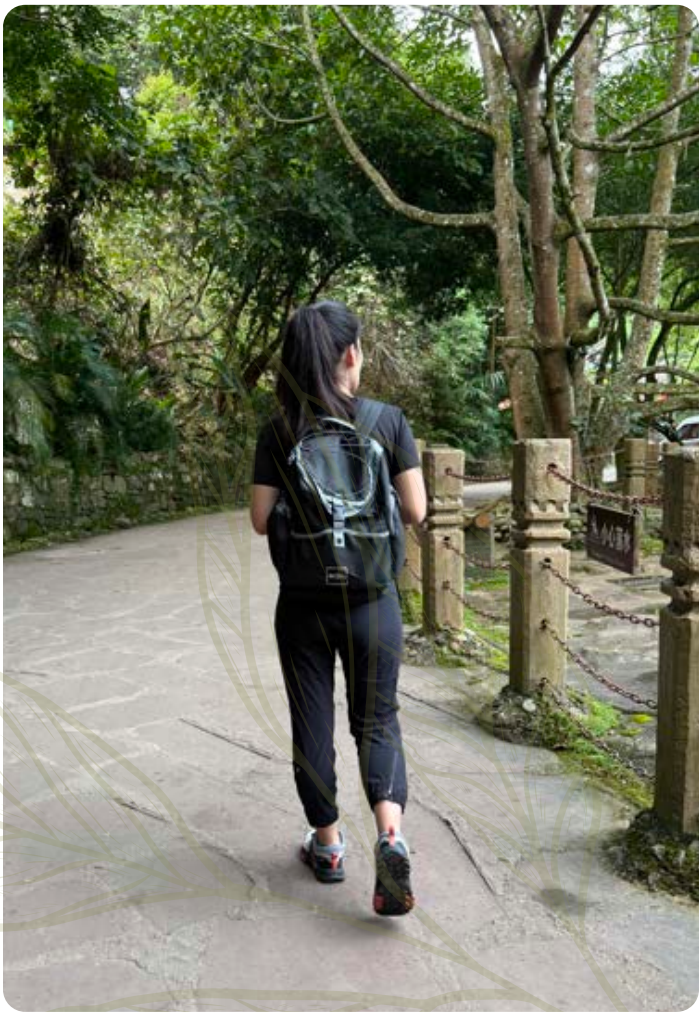
Jingmai's UNESCO Story

- 1 HISTORIC HOMES**
293 traditional pile dwellings with Nuogang preserving 94 in original form.
- 2 CULTURAL DIVERSITY**
Home to Dai, Han, Wa, and Blang ethnic groups.
- 3 VILLAGE NETWORK**
Comprises 9 natural villages across the mountain.
- 4 ANCIENT TEA FOREST**
Encompasses 1,189 hectares of old-growth tea trees.

HEMGROWN HOSPITALITY

Qianqian's stay in Dapingzhang, at the Abelia Hotel, was far from a typical resort experience. It was a thoughtful expression of hospitality rooted in local tradition. Instead of allowing large-scale development, the local government had restored four traditional homes and connected them to form a guesthouse. "It felt more like being welcomed into a village than staying at a hotel," she shares. "You could feel the community's pride in sharing their way of life without changing it for tourism." Many families have also followed suit, opening their homes to guests.

At the highest point of Abelia, visitors can hike scenic trails, join community-led activities, and, on her first evening there, Qianqian took part in a traditional tea ceremony. The 'roasting' was led by Mr. Kiba, a respected member of the Blang ethnic group and recognized steward of the region's tea heritage. "I had some time to talk with Mr. Kiba before the ceremony began," says Qianqian. "He told me about the Blang culture and how roasted tea carries deep significance." As tea leaves were gently roasted over firewood from the surrounding forest, their smoky aroma filled the air. "They said if the smoke comes your way, it means good luck and fortune," Qianqian smiles. "I didn't expect a cup of tea to carry so much meaning – but in that moment, it all came together."



TEA BY HAND TRADITION BY HEART

1. PICKING



2. WITHERING



3. PAN-FRYING



4. ROLLING



5. DRYING



Woken up by a beautiful sunrise – one predicted the night prior by Mr. Kiba – Qianqian got ready to meet with the Zai family for a traditional tea picking experience in the forest. With over 300 acres of land under their care, the family, like many in the region, had built a livelihood from generations of tea cultivation. “They walked me through how to pick the right leaves and I quickly realized there’s a real art to it,” reminisces Qianqian.

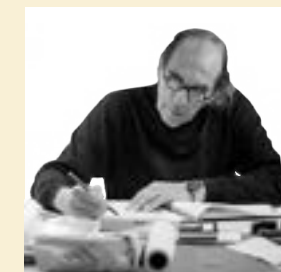
So, in the quiet of the morning, surrounded by mist and birdsong, Qianqian picked nearly two kilograms of tea. From there, she followed the entire production process – starting with withering to reduce moisture, followed by pan-frying the leaves to soften, and then hand-rolling to enhance the aroma and shape. And while modern tools have made processing more efficient for some, many Jingmai families still rely on techniques passed through generations. “The care and precision behind each hand-crafted batch was humbling,” she explains. The final step, drying, took two to three days before the tea was ready to be pressed into cakes and packaged. Qianqian continues, “Every stage was so intentional. It gave me a whole new respect for what’s inside a single cup.”

SAVORING THE SIP – AND THE STORY

Towards the end of her trip, as she meandered through the unpaved streets of Dapingzhang, Qianqian took in the endless sights and sounds of a bustling, yet traditional city. “I prayed under the trees, cruised on a motorbike I borrowed from a stranger (don’t worry, I returned it), and indulged in cuisine made from the backyards of locals,” reminisces Qianqian. “And through it all, I remained in awe of how the people protected the biodiversity and cultural tradition while welcoming others into their culture. It was truly inspiring.”

“Their kindness and how naturally they made me feel like a friend, was something I didn’t expect,” she recalls. In the village, anyone who owns a tea shop invites visitors to stop by and sample their brews for free. It’s not about making a sale, but sharing a way of life. Passed down through generations, there’s a strong reverence for the national and traditional art of tea planting. “What stood out most was how the younger generation, unlike in many other mountain villages, chose to stay and carry forward the family tea business rather than leaving for city life.”

Qianqian concludes by explaining the meaning behind tea’s Chinese character. “The pictographic presentation of the word is made up of three parts: Grass, Human, and Tree,” she explains. “While this visually illustrates Chinese people’s understanding of tea, it also represents the intersections of humans with nature.” For her, it’s a reminder that thoughtful design, like tea, emerges from a respect for the land, a sensitivity to cultural roots, and a desire to bring people and nature into harmony. In that sense, landscape architecture, much like the traditional pu’er tea, becomes both a practice and a philosophy, one that nurtures connection, place, and meaning. □



THE JOSEPH J. LALLI FELLOWSHIP is an annual designation granted to an EDSA employee who presents a compelling proposal to travel and immerse themselves in a culture in order to better understand the attributes of that place and its influence on design.

Little Things



In celebrating the small joys — moments tied to milestones or discovered in the quiet in-between — our team shares little things that brighten their day.

HA
HA HA
HA HA
HA HA
HA



- 1 Opening a fresh pack of trace paper — small joys, big ideas.
— **Joanna Ibarra**
- 2 That moment when a sketch goes from an abstract mess to 'hey, this might actually work'.
— **Angie Kealy**
- 3 The short chats that turn into big ideas. Those unplanned collisions are the best part of studio life.
— **Luis Loaiza**



4 Our competitive spirit. Whether it's a project deadline or the office Sweet 16 pool, we're always playing to win!
– **Eric Propes**

5 Knowing that I'm making a difference in the built world alongside my team. Bringing excellence in design thinking and problem solving – and saving the world one model at a time!
– **Jack Garcia**

6 A meeting-less day with a great playlist to set the vibe.
– **Yun Bang**

7 Finding out there's leftover food in the breakroom. Best site visit ever!
– **Marc Hall**

8 My desk plant. It's survived 5 charrettes and 2 office moves – basically a coworker at this point.
– **Kona Gray**

9 The group sigh of relief (and laughter) when a deliverable finally gets sent off.
– **Alexia Letsche**

10 My team... and when the coffee machine works on the first try.
– **April Allen**

11 The amazing colleagues I get to work with! Their energy, kindness, and encouragement make even the difficult days a little brighter.
– **Katie Mena**



12 The numerous types of tea lying around the office from every region of the world.
– **Riley Jimenez**



13 When a teammate drops the perfect GIF in the group chat – it's an instant morale boost!
– **Hannah Thomson**



14 Music of all genres, rhythms, and languages. And since not everyone may be in the mood, I make sure to keep the speaker next to me!
– **Santiago Lorenzo**

15 Amazing projects and even more amazing people!
– **Gregg Sutton**

16 When the office is buzzing with collaboration, it feels less like work and more like building something great together.
– **Ryan Clifton**



17 Getting feedback from my coworkers, whether it's praise or a pointer, helps me see what I'm nailing and where I can grow stronger.
– **Sebastian Duarte**

18 When someone's dog visits the office. Productivity? Debatable. Morale? Sky high!
– **Sabrina Hooker**



19 Celebrating a perfectly executed detail like it's a major milestone – because it is.
– **Brandon Orrick**

20 Traveling and exploring a new place and realizing inspiration is everywhere.
– **Pete Dunne**

21 When the client says, 'You read our minds.' That's always the greatest feedback.
– **Dan D'Angelo**

22 Seeing a new hire find their groove on day one – it's like watching the team level up in real time.
– **Sam Rivera**



This is not the last page, but an invitation to keep imagining, keep creating, and keep shaping the world we share. We invite you to carry this inspiration outward — into your work, your communities, and the future we're building together.

– The EDSA Team



