



a place of mind

campus + community planning
planning + design

Project Details

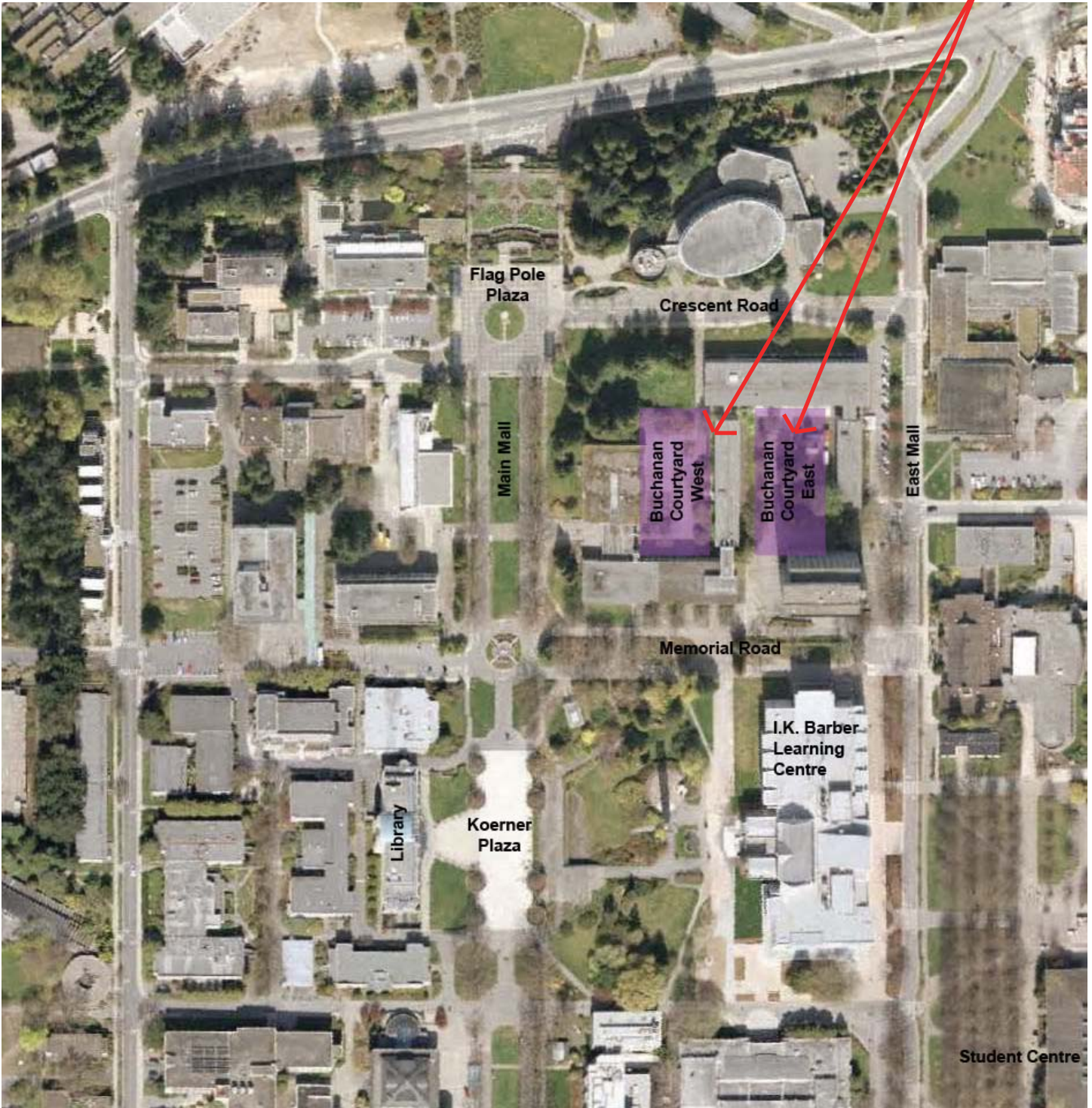
Category	Excellence in Landscape Architecture for General Design
Project Name	Buchanan Courtyards
Institution Name + Location	The University of British Columbia Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada
Institution Type	Public University
Campus Population	8,890 Staff; 3,267 Faculty; and 48,722 Students
Project Completion Date	May 2011
Project Cost	\$2,780,000
Construction Cost	\$2,197,000 / \$28.00 per square foot
Size	78,000 SF
Site Area Affected	78,000 SF
Third Party Sustainability Rating	N/A

Campus Map | University of British Columbia



Context | Buchanan Courtyards

Buchanan Courtyards



Site Plan | Buchanan Courtyards



Scope of the Project

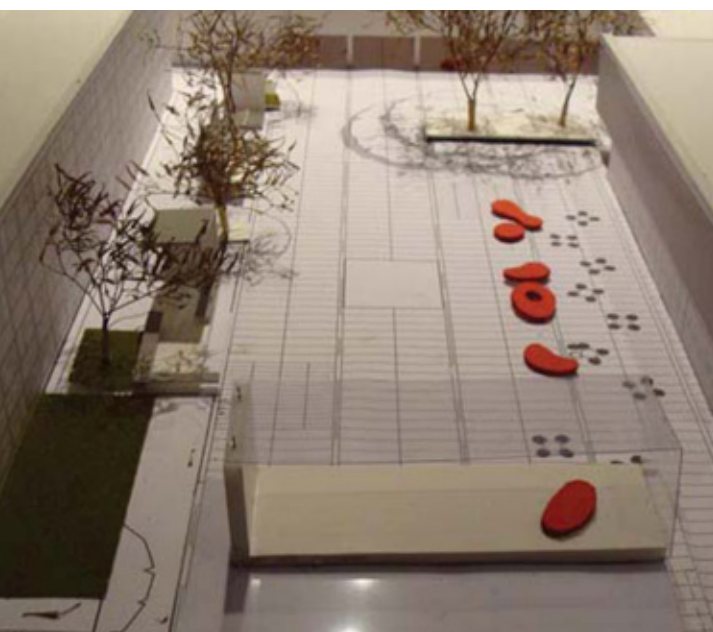
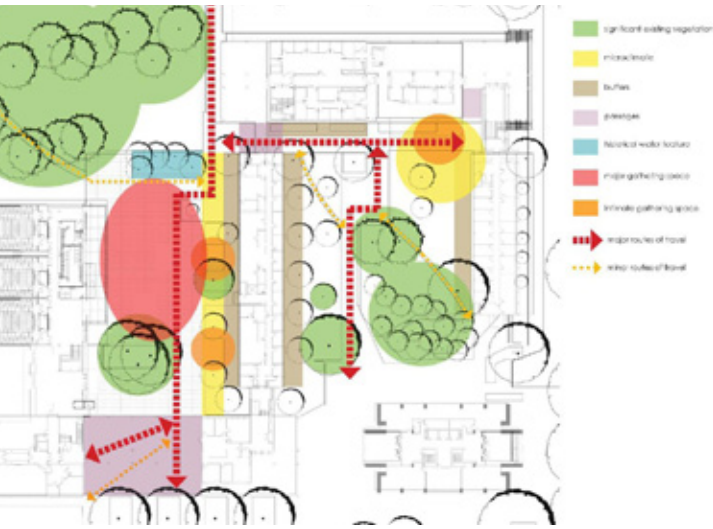
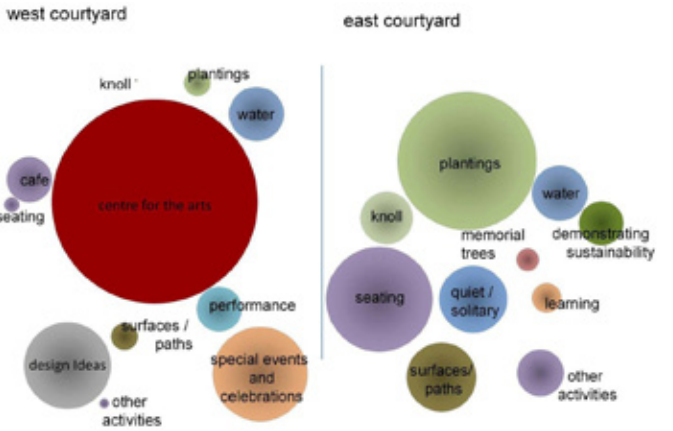


Images (Clockwise from top left): Buchanan West Courtyard — looking south before redesign; Innovative site furnishings after redesign; and Buchanan West Courtyard — looking north before redesign

A core goal of the recently adopted UBC Vancouver Campus Plan is the creation of a more vibrant campus, transformed from a single primary use (study) to a full range of uses (study, work, live and play), a place where people want to hang out. Key to this transformation is the \$62-million-dollar Public Realm Plan (2009), which aims to create dynamic public spaces; encourage informal outdoor learning; promote idea sharing and creativity; nurture physical and mental health; and instill pride and a sense of place. The Buchanan Courtyards project, which revitalizes two courtyards in a complex of buildings housing the Faculty of Arts, is the first Public Realm Plan project to be completed.

A major challenge was the original landscape, which reflected the surrounding modernist architecture: austere and underdeveloped, with virtually no seating, weather-protected areas, or other animating features. Over time the courtyards fell into disrepair and failed to showcase the identities and programming needs of the Arts community. Additional challenges included budgetary restraints and the desire to retain existing trees and some paving while creating greater porosity between exterior and interior spaces. But the main challenge was to design the courtyards so that students, faculty and staff would be drawn to congregate and interact there.

Integrated Planning



A working group was formed to guide the design team. It included representatives from users (students, faculty, staff), facility manager, food services manager, campus design and planning staff, and the School of Landscape Architecture. The design process involved extensive consultation with the Faculty of Arts community. Through an interactive full-day workshop co-hosted by the Dean, forty students and staff worked with consultants to establish recommendations for the aesthetics and programming of the courtyards, for both the 24 hours of the day and four seasons of the year. Then 205 community members voted on their program priorities.

Based on this process, each of the courtyards was designed to have a distinct character. The community envisioned the West Courtyard as a gathering place enlivened by exhibitions, lectures and performances. A less programmed approach was applied to the East Courtyard, envisaged as an informal place for reflection and relaxation, with a rain garden and striking planting. A series of design concepts was presented at an open house, at which point the needs and preferences of the community were affirmed.

Redevelopment of the courtyards into places for comfortable sitting, eating, studying, films, concerts, exhibits, etc., transformed them into inclusive and dynamic places that celebrate the dynamism of the Faculty of Arts community.

Images (Top to bottom): User Programming Preferences; Concept Plan; and Study Model for West Courtyard

Implementation



The West Courtyard was envisioned as “a contemporary agora of the arts,” like the ancient Greek public spaces used for gatherings, celebrations and the exchange of ideas. In it the arts community attends concerts, barbeques, theatre productions, open-air movie nights and art exhibits. A pavilion at the north end serves as sculpture, stage, and outdoor extension of the café occupying the adjacent building. Innovative site furnishings build on the origami qualities of the pavilion and provide comfortable furnishing for “perching,” “lounging,” eating and working. The folded forms extend vertically to provide overhead rain protection in some places. Sculptural seating, artwork, dramatic plantings and theatre-style lighting also animate the space.

In contrast, the East Courtyard or “Green” is a quieter, more casual space for contemplation, reading, relaxing – and communing with nature. It features a long, curved bench, other benches set amid tall reed grasses, a grassed knoll to take advantage of excellent sun exposure and significant drought-tolerant and native plantings. Special consideration was given to retention of trees and creation of a rain garden to manage and purify rainwater. This garden forms part of a comprehensive storm-water harvesting and recycling system that contributes to the campus’s sustainability goals.



Images (Top to bottom): The East Courtyard Rain Garden; Ipe Seatwall at Knoll in East Courtyard; and Path Through East Courtyard

Results



Images (Left to right): The Pavilion at Night; and Pivoting Sculptural Seating

It was important that the design respond to a variety of uses, environments, and scales. The West Courtyard — The Agora — accommodates both individuals and groups as large as 1,000 people. The courtyard spaces form busy pedestrian nodes within the larger campus context. The edges are animated with a vibrant café in the West Courtyard and a student lounge in the East Courtyard. Sun orientation activates high use of seating on the east side of The Agora. Interaction is encouraged by clustered seating arrangements and enhanced by a calendar of programmed events.

The pavilion serves as a stage for performances. Unprogrammed activity emanates from a café and is supported by building canopies for rain protection and seating elements that include power-sourced tables for eating and working. The Faculty of Arts identity is expressed in the sculptural quality of site elements, community-inspired text inscriptions, and lighting. Art exhibits and performances express the dynamic community on a regular basis. The design is more than a collection of landscape elements; it provides a frame and forum for a range of engaging and transformative experiences.

Project Decision-Making



Images (Left to right): Faculty Inscriptions on Bottom of Reflecting Pool; and Innovative Site Furnishings

Campus identity + sense of place

The general need for retrofitting and a desire to provide a sustainable and healthy environment for Buchanan users were also seen as an opportunity to set an example of green design on the UBC campus, as well as an occasion to celebrate a beautiful, mature west coast landscape set among heritage buildings. The project remedies the courtyards' gradual erosion in appearance and functionality over fifty years, renewing these public spaces to accommodate the new needs, identities and programming of its users. The new courtyards offer students many different opportunities for relaxing, studying and conversing.

Image + identity enhancement

The faculty imagined the courtyards as physical "expressions" of their community. Each of the 25 departments and schools supplied a quote to develop a visual expression to symbolize "The Arts" community. The quotations, over 8,000 characters in 11 languages, were set in radiating rings at the bottom of the reflecting pool. This aspect of the project was so well received it became the foundation for a new visual identity and branding for the faculty. A calendar of events includes concerts, festivals, art exhibitions and convocation ceremonies and, perhaps more importantly, impromptu student-led events such as recitals, soapbox speeches and art displays.

Project Decision-Making



Master plan implementation and/or campus transformation

The project is a model for one of five key planks of the University's Public Realm Plan, "Informal Social and Learning Spaces." Such areas are designed to be intimate spaces that express the culture of the surrounding faculty or department. Our metric of success was that these spaces be economically sustainable and well used by the community, a goal that has been resoundingly met. The project has built increased support in the UBC Executive for the Public Realm Plan and resulted in nothing short of a total transformation of the courtyards from austere, unloved spaces into hubs of community activity and engagement.



Storm water treatment

Every year, five billion litres of precipitation falls on the campus; most flows into storm water infrastructure. In Buchanan Courtyards, however, rainwater is harvested from hard surfaces and conveyed via a water channel to the rain garden. Here littoral vegetation filters the water before it is captured and pumped to a cistern under the pavilion. This storage provides all of the site's irrigation and reflecting pool recharge needs. Extensive drought-tolerant and native planting in the courtyards also limit irrigation needs. The system assisted an adjacent renovated building in achieving LEED Gold status and showcases the University's commitment to environmental sustainability.



Student life support and creation of outdoor rooms

Within the framework of UBC's Public Realm Plan, the Buchanan Courtyards is the first in a series of "Informal Social and Learning Spaces" to be developed over the next few years. The completed project models open spaces designed to facilitate interaction and activity and that reflect the belief that academic life is enhanced through informal encounters and learning outside of the classroom. Given the stressful demands of academic life for both students and faculty, the courtyards also support the need for contemplation and reflection.

Images (Top to bottom): Paving Edge at Rain Garden; Seating at the Rain Garden; and East Courtyard Panorama



February 17, 2012

To 2012 Awards Jury:

The Buchanan Courtyards project revitalizes two courtyards in a complex of buildings housing UBC's Faculty of Arts. This project was the first to advance within the context of the 2009 Vancouver Campus Public Realm Plan, which aims to invigorate UBC's public spaces, encourage informal outdoor learning, improve the health of students, faculty and staff, and instill pride and a strong sense of place.

The design process involved extensive consultation with the Faculty of Arts community. Based on feedback from this process, each of the courtyards was designed to have a distinct character. However, both were designed as inclusive and vibrant places that celebrate the dynamism of the Faculty of Arts community. The identity of the Faculty is expressed in the sculptural quality of site elements, community-inspired text inscriptions, and lighting. Art exhibits and performances support this goal.

The West Courtyard was conceived as a gathering place, and a centre for the faculty enlivened by formal and impromptu activities such as concerts, plays, barbeques and art exhibits. A pavilion serves as sculpture, stage, and outdoor café extension. Innovative furnishings provide comfortable spots for lounging, eating and working. Dramatic artwork, plantings and lighting animate the space.

A less programmed approach was applied to the East Courtyard and is characterized by a greater abundance of softscape, and a quieter, more casual style to support contemplation, reading, and communing with nature. It includes benches, a rain garden and striking native plantings. The rain garden is part of a comprehensive storm-water recycling system that contributes to UBC's sustainability goals.

The design is more than a collection of landscape elements; it provides a frame and forum for a range of engaging and transformative experiences. The project has resulted in nothing short of a total transformation of the Buchanan Courtyards from austere, unloved spaces into hubs of community activity and engagement.

Yours truly,

Dean Gregory
Campus Landscape Architect
CSLA, ASLA, LEED AP