

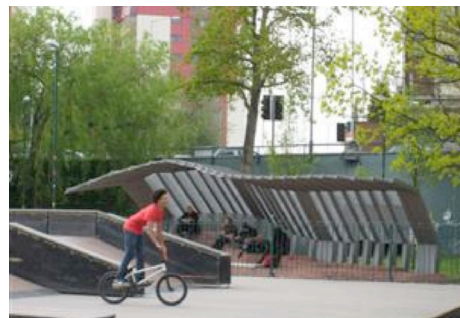
MADE

Wolverhampton Youth space

Creative use of a traffic island - Penn Island in the centre of Wolverhampton - as a skate park led to the commissioning of a youth shelter through MADE (Midlands Architecture and the Designed Environment) and Government Office for the West Midlands.

Introduction

The Wolverhampton Youth Space is one of a series of unique shelters in the region. Each reflects a different design response to the people and place where it is situated and the result of collaboration between architect, artist and young people. The site, Penn Island traffic island in the centre of Wolverhampton is reachable only by subway. The space used as a skate park is surrounded by mature trees that screen the noise and pollution from the surrounding traffic.



Design process

Sjölander da Cruz collaborated with artist Gwen Heeney to develop the design during a number of workshops, in which young skateboarders, rollerbladers and BMX bikers played a central role. The form is derived from the analysis of the movement of skaters as they perform tricks and moves, creating a shelter that blurs the distinction between art and architecture.



The youth space provides a place for social interaction, relaxation and acts as a seat for spectators to watch users of Penn Island skate-park in action.

In order to foster a sense of ownership, and to ensure that the space truly reflected the ideas and aspirations of its end users, the design team included young people with a passion for rollerblading, BMX biking and skateboarding. The team worked simultaneously with this consultation group and local artist Gwen Heeney in a series of creative workshops, where materials such as paint, clay and willow were used to document the movement of the young people at the skate park. This resource of ideas was then developed into the form of the shelter.

Upon entering Penn Island by subway, the sense of volume and light are heightened. This recessed vibrant and active space houses the dynamic and fluid activities that take part in the skate park, a beautiful and complex rhythm in complete opposition to restrictions on movement elsewhere in the area. The shelter embodies this energy and dynamism, expressing the movement of skateboarders, rollerbladers and BMX riders.

The juxtaposition of forms in the flowing shape of the shelter and cylindrical concrete walls of the island emphasise a perception of the space as a sanctuary, and present a legible distinction that people can relate to and enjoy.

The shelter consists of a curvaceous brick base, providing an undulating surface for sitting, leaning and riding upon. This plinth, hand carved by designers and users of the skate park rests like a beach below the crashing wave-like form of the cantilevered steel canopy. The canopy is based upon forms taken from the workshops, reflecting the movement of skateboarders, and it is rhythmically broken down into a series of ribs, offering a structural and aesthetic design.

Areas between ribs are in-filled with either an open steel mesh, or solid panels, emphasising the visual and physical connection to the context, or enclosure and protection. This connection to the context and users is a strong feature of this design-led process, which offers an alternative to the mass produced shelters for young people that are available through catalogues.

Evaluation

The local young people have adopted the structure as a gathering point, extending their ownership and use beyond the fenced confines of the adjacent skate park. Within hours of the project's completion, people were sitting, leaning and lying on its contours, showing that the provision is something that was appreciated and is being enjoyed by the people it was intended for.

Furthermore, the edges of the brick base have now been coated in layers of wax, as the young people have started to skate, ride and blade on the structure itself. Other signs, such as spray painting and nicknames really strengthen the success of the project as an object that kept the local community involved in its conception, and resulted in a structure that redefines Penn Island to reinforce the connection of local people to their environment.

Key design features to look out for

- Cantilevered steel canopy inspired by the movement of skateboarders, rollerbladers and BMX riders
- The plinth, hand carved by designers and users of the skate park
- The connection of the design to the context
- Offers an alternative to the mass produced shelters for young people that are available through catalogues

Link and downloads

Sjölander da Cruz Architects website www.sjolanderdacruz.co.uk

Contact for further information

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