

Good Design Meets Serendipity in the Most Essential Way



Architecture
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An unwavering requirement of good design is that it is timeless. With the introduction of COVID-19, the importance of multi-functional spaces that can pivot to accommodate new ways of use – which is not new conceptually, but a valued benefit in project design now more than ever – has increased focus as organizations and companies globally respond to safe use of space.

University of Arizona's Honors Village

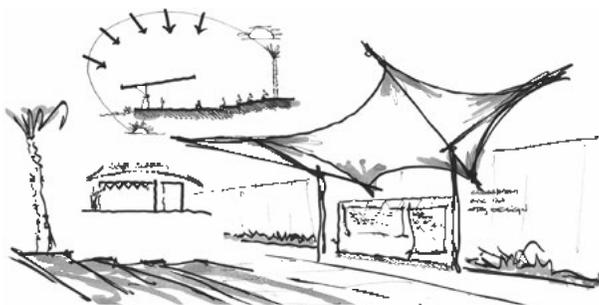
When STG Design began design development for the University of Arizona's Honors Village in 2016, COVID-19 was obviously not on anyone's radar. However, key design elements employed by STG have allowed the University to maximize use of the Village while safety concerns and social distancing are critical. The Village serves as a residential complex featuring multiple amenities like academic spaces, collaborative learning classrooms, faculty and staff offices, a wellness center, an interior courtyard providing flexible classrooms, outdoor recreational areas, and impromptu meeting spaces including a small outdoor amphitheater for gathering. Responding to the University's desire to increase the amount of outdoor space for student use, the STG team repurposed a pedestrian area between two of the campus buildings; closing a street between them and essentially bridging the space and creating a functional recreation and gathering area to supplement the interior courtyard.



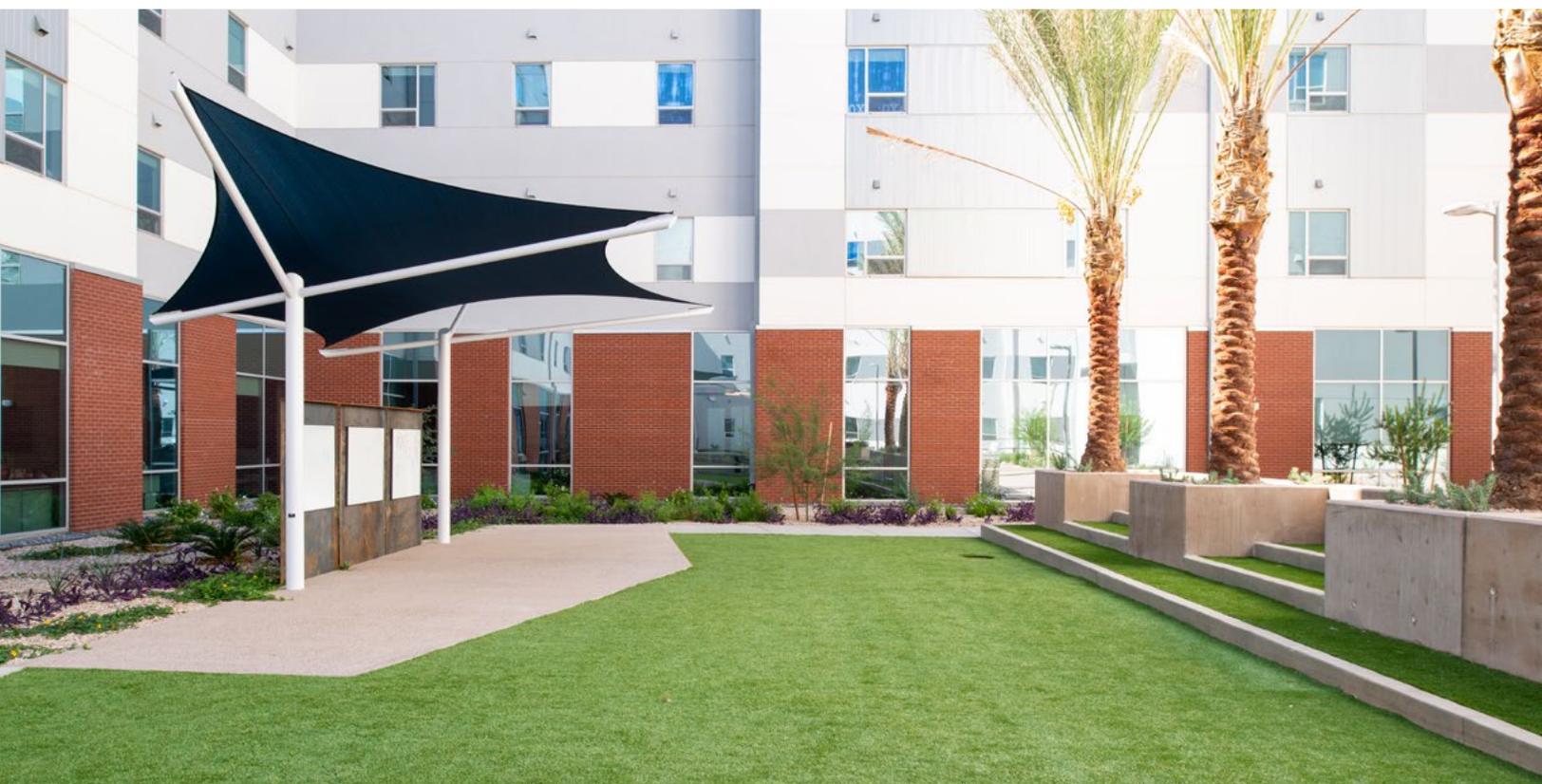
To increase the amount of open, light-infused space accessible to students, the five-story residential tower surrounding the interior courtyard was designed to provide views and allow light to enter. A careful balance of light and shade was established to allow protective shade for the times of day when students use the space most. Additionally, STG ensured that every space served multiple functions (providing ease of dual use) and assured the Public Private Partnership responsible for project development, that this University hub would capitalize on use of the land – a premium on campus.

As part of the commitment to fluidity of space, an early design element proved particularly useful with both permanent and moveable seating in the outdoor amphitheater to encourage and accommodate groups of all sizes with varying seating requirements. “While we always design

with future flexibility in mind, never before have we so immediately seen that flexibility enacted. It really validated the design solution,” said project architect Michael Gilbert, RA. The courtyard also features areas with multiple built-in tables naturally distanced by hardscape planters woven into the landscape to encourage privacy and separation, which is particularly critical now. “When we created the outdoor amphitheater, we knew it would be a very useful space. Given the new restrictions and need for outdoor, socially-distanced learning spaces, the covered space has become even more important. Creating a visually attractive and practical covering that works well at different times of day and in all seasons is crucial to the success of the project,” says UA’s David Scott Allen, Special Advisor to the Dean.



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At the Honors College, deliberate programming, coupled with good design, led to adaptive use that allows for unanticipated and unprecedented scenarios. During a recent one-year, post-construction walk-through of the facility, UA was weighing how to reopen while meeting the needs of their students and faculty on campus in a COVID-19 scenario.

Classroom space was a main challenge. By adding specially designed sun sails throughout the outdoor courtyard, the University advantageously repurposed the amenity space as dedicated outdoor classrooms that provide safe social distancing of groups from 5 – 60 students. Good design, and a bit of serendipity, result in an efficient and cost-effective learning environment. Add whiteboards made of the same materials as the retaining walls and we create a functional space with visual unity and a sense of permanence. “With the high value placed on land, STG made good on the dual- purpose design we delivered to the University that has become essential in the COVID-19 environment,” said project designer, Jeff Ervin.

As the University prepares for a fall semester opening, they will welcome students to a facility that allows for safety and quality education as the main focus; all made possible through good design from the start.

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