



LAS VEGAS SPRINGS PRESERVE Desert Living Center

Las Vegas, Nevada

In a region where water is precious, the fastest growing city in North America was facing a challenge: its 2001 consumption levels would mean that Las Vegas would run out of water in seven years. As part of a massive water conservation program, the Las Vegas Valley Water District (LVVWD) and the Las Vegas Springs Preserve Foundation hired AldrichPears Associates to develop an interpretive master plan for a pristine parcel of historic land in the center of the city. The resulting 180-acre Las Vegas Springs Preserve (LVSP) is home to several major institutions, all positioned to engage visitors with the valley's past and inspire action toward a sustainable future. The jewel of the project is The Desert Living Center (DLC).

The Desert Living Center offers residents and visitors the inspiration, practical strategies and tools they need to conserve their valuable water and live sustainably in the desert. Together with Lucchesi Galati Architects and landscape architects Deneen Powell Atelier Inc., AldrichPears Associates played a pivotal role in developing concepts, exhibits, and programs for this one-of-a-kind facility. Working with a complex of five LEED rated buildings, including the first platinum-rated LEED building in Nevada, the design team developed several large galleries that take different approaches to demonstrating sustainable design under the overarching theme "Rediscover Desert Living". Exhibits illustrate the benefits of recycling, conservation and alternative energy sources in a fun and interactive environment for adults and children of all ages.

GOALS

The LVVWD wanted a facility that was first and foremost a community resource – one that would motivate Las Vegans to address the conservation issues they face as residents of the Mojave Desert. The challenge was to provide visitors with the knowledge and tools that would inspire and empower them to make lifestyle changes for a sustainable future, without compromising their quality of life.

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

The design team used a number of strategies to meet the Desert Living Center's goals and challenges.

Make it relevant

To motivate Las Vegans to value their environmental resources and protect them, AldrichPears wanted to show each resident that they are part of the desert's water cycle. For example, the floor treatment and simple rockwork



along the corridor leading to the sustainability gallery suggest a symbolic relationship between the visitor and the river.

As visitors drink from a water fountain at the end of the corridor, they physically enter the water cycle. By understanding their dependence on water, visitors come to realize how much they are “of” the desert, rather than simply “in” it. How will they conserve their desert’s resources? The sustainability gallery’s familiar icons of daily life make the concept of sustainability accessible. A cutaway motor home demonstrates alternative fuels; the interactive Smart Shopper game helps players make eco-friendly choices at the grocery store; and a kitchen, bathroom, and home workshop provide familiar environments to showcase sustainable alternatives.

Make it accessible to all ages

Sustainability is the balance between the needs of our environment, culture, community and economy. This is not just a concept for adults: the sustainability gallery’s fun, lighthearted exhibitry communicates practical messages about lifestyle changes and sustainable living for adults and young people alike. While kids come face to face with live wriggler worms in the Compost Crawl, their parents can learn how to compost household organic waste. Kids can jump on the Energy Bike to experience how much energy it takes to power appliances, or try their hand at building a wind turbine.

Take it further

The Desert Living Center is unprecedented in the US. With its emphasis on action-based education, the DLC is setting the standard for community partnership and environmental sensitivity. The Center’s Design Lab is a resource for homeowners and building professionals, as well as curious visitors, highlighting the effects of a conservation approach in urban design and architecture. Discussions on environmental issues carry into the Dialogue Center’s relaxed classrooms, where school programs, conferences, and workshops take place. AldrichPears is also working on behalf of the LVSP to identify traveling exhibits that complement the permanent exhibits.

Lead by example

The DLC site and buildings incorporate sustainable design as an example for residents of the Mojave. Interpretive sculptural elements highlight the DLC buildings’ green design features. Straw bale walls, rammed earth walls, passive cooling towers, recycled content carpets, and earth berming are part of the sustainability showcase. The AldrichPears design team developed an interpretive plan for the Center’s xeriscaped demonstration garden. Immersed in green design indoors and out, visitors are continuously engaged in considering how to live more sustainably, saving both energy and money.

CONCLUSION

The Desert Living Center offers Las Vegas residents and design professionals the inspiration, design strategies, and tools they need to profoundly influence the future of their community – and the environment. As the “green movement” becomes more mainstream and more relevant each year, the DLC is positioned to become an important showcase for urban sustainability in the West. AldrichPears is proud to have played a key role in a project that will inspire and support continued community action toward a sustainable future.