

CASE STUDY

CURBSIDE CULTURE: A NEW SIDE TO STREET DINING

2025



CASE STUDY: "DINE DIFFERENTLY" — TRANSFORMING URBAN STREET DINING WITH OPEN-AIR PARKLETS





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As cities continue to grapple with urban density and the growing demand for vibrant, adaptable environments, public space activation has become more essential than ever. One innovative step forward has been the transition of temporary outdoor dining programs into permanent, structured solutions that enhance streetscapes and expand opportunities for community gathering.

THE VISION FOR URBAN DINING

Originally launched during the COVID-19 pandemic, these initiatives began as emergency responses that allowed restaurants and cafés to serve patrons by converting sidewalks and parking spaces into dining areas. With their popularity and proven success, many cities have since chosen to formalize and elevate the parklet model. The vision is clear: create semi-permanent outdoor dining spaces that enhance the pedestrian experience, support local businesses, and bring design-driven vitality to urban streets.

THE CHALLENGE

To transform a patchwork of temporary installations into cohesive, design-forward outdoor spaces, many cities have developed comprehensive guidelines and infrastructure standards for parklets and street dining. These efforts often require collaboration among a wide range of stakeholders, including businesses, designers, technical experts, and the public, to balance safety, aesthetics, and functionality.

At the core of these initiatives is the need for barrier systems and modular elements that are not only safe and compliant with city codes but also adaptable to the unique character of individual establishments. By emphasizing attractive design, customization, and long-term durability, these solutions elevate outdoor dining from a quick fix into an integral part of the urban landscape.

OUR ROLE: CUSTOM ENGINEERING MEETS URBAN DESIGN

Planters Unlimited's strength has always been in custom fabrication, and that capability proved essential in transforming temporary dining solutions into cohesive, long-term parklet systems. Our team was selected for our ability to engineer site-specific, high-quality solutions that marry aesthetics, durability, and modularity.

From the start, we worked collaboratively with city planners and design partners to develop a flexible kit-of-parts system—one that met strict technical requirements while elevating both the look and feel of the pedestrian experience. A key priority was creating components that could be removed and reinstalled with ease, allowing for adaptability during maintenance, seasonal changes, or special events.

Despite this flexibility, our barrier and planter systems were engineered to meet rigorous impact-resistance standards, delivering a secure, semi-permanent solution without requiring permanent ground attachment. This balance of mobility, safety, and structural integrity, combined with our in-house manufacturing expertise and collaborative design approach, is what Planters Unlimited brings to every project: custom solutions that not only solve functional challenges but also enhance the built environment.



1. Modular Frame System

- Designed to accommodate any length of parklet.
- Engineered for placement on custom deck platforms that extend curb height to street level.

2. Impact-Resistant Barriers

- Barrier systems constructed from GFRC.
- Weight-calibrated to meet city-mandated vehicular safety standards (6,000 lbs impact resistance at 30").
- No need for permanent attachment—barriers are freestanding and interlocked for stability.

3. Vegetation-Ready Designs

- Barriers double as planters with pre-integrated vegetation compartments.
- While the City provided pre-approved palettes of living plants, Planters Unlimited can also offer artificial plant palettes as part of our core offering for future projects—delivering low-maintenance greenery without sacrificing design integrity.

4. Accessory Integration

- Supports screens, branded signage, trellising, lighting, and weather-protection elements.
- Seamlessly integrates into the Kit-of-Parts design with quick-install capabilities.

5. Finishes & Form Factors

- Custom finishes: Charcoal, Oatmeal, Sand, White, Bone.
- Custom forms: Fluted, Pleated, Modern Rectangle, and Scalloped designs

COLLABORATION WITH CITY ARCHITECTS

Working closely with city architects and urban design teams, Planters Unlimited engaged in detailed design reviews and iterative prototyping to ensure every component aligned with architectural intent, structural standards, and the community's aesthetic vision. These collaborations often bring together progressive design thinking with a deep understanding of how to shape public spaces that are both functional and reflective of local culture.

Planters Unlimited's adaptability and precision in custom fabrication complement this vision, helping transform modular concepts into forward-thinking streetscape solutions. Our ability to engineer to exacting specifications, accommodate city codes, and incorporate urban design principles is pivotal in advancing adaptive reuse and enhancing the public realm. This process includes meticulous coordination of structural analyses, tolerance requirements, and seamless integration with decking systems, supported by the delivery of on-site prototypes for real-time feedback and approval.

By remaining flexible and collaborative, we are able to provide design modifications that uphold the project's architectural language while optimizing for performance, safety, and ease of installation. Whether with living or artificial plant palettes, Planters Unlimited ensures each project delivers a cohesive, durable, and visually compelling outcome that elevates the pedestrian experience.



KEY INSTALLATIONS



The Cheesecake Factory

The largest parklet deployment to date took place in front of The Cheesecake Factory, where Planters Unlimited delivered a highly customized solution tailored to the site's unique safety and spatial needs. This installation featured 12 large-scale parklet planters engineered with integrated rebar cages and concrete-filled bases. These design features were not only crucial for meeting the specific weight and impact resistance requirements set forth by the City, but they also ensured the planters remained freestanding and secure without the need for permanent ground attachment. This strategic combination of structural integrity and aesthetic appeal exemplifies how Planters Unlimited blends form and function to deliver high-performance urban streetscape solutions.

Ferrarini Cafe

Planters Unlimited provided stand-alone barrier units for this site, delivering a clean, minimalist look that aligned with the café's design vision while still meeting city safety and aesthetic standards. This installation showcased the adaptability of our barrier systems to meet site-specific requirements without compromising performance or visual appeal. A key difference in this project was that we delivered the barriers without the added weight, as the client opted to add the weight onsite, allowing for greater flexibility in the installation process.

Results

Thanks to the city's vision and Planters Unlimited's execution, the transition from temporary to semi-permanent parklets was seamless. Our products fit precisely into the platform and sidewalk extensions, offering safe, beautiful, and easy-to-install dining environments.

What Makes Us Different

- Customization without compromise: Our barriers were purpose-built to meet city guidelines without forcing clients to sacrifice design vision.
- Precision and quality: From prototype to final delivery, each product was tailored to site-specific conditions.
- Collaborative partner: From early input in the design phase to on-site adaptations, we offered the flexibility and know-how to get it right.
- Streamlined for businesses: Restaurant owners can choose from approved finishes and forms with lead times of 6–8 weeks.





LOOKING AHEAD: SCALING FOR OTHER CITIES AND BUSINESSES

Planters Unlimited offers cities and businesses a proven model for public space transformation. Whether it's a pilot program or citywide initiative.

Planters Unlimited brings the same precision, adaptability, and creative partnership to cities and businesses of all scales. Whether the goal is a citywide outdoor dining initiative or a single restaurant looking to expand its footprint, our team offers a proven, streamlined approach. We deliver pre-approved prototypes tailored to municipal requirements, conduct educational Lunch & Learn sessions with key stakeholders, and provide full customization of designs for any climate or location.

Our collaborative process also includes coordination with local architects and regulatory agencies to ensure each installation aligns with both structural and aesthetic goals. This flexible, start-to-finish support system makes Planters Unlimited an ideal partner for transforming outdoor dining into a lasting community asset.

Let's transform outdoor dining—together.

BOOK A CALL WITH OUR EXPERT SALES EXECUTIVE.



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