

CASE STUDY

SOLANA BEACH

2025



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ACHIEVING BIOPHILIA THROUGH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: THE SANDBOX SOLANA BEACH PROJECT

Nestled along the Pacific Coast Highway in the heart of Solana Beach, The Sandbox, Solana Beach is a groundbreaking mixed-use development that embodies the principles of biophilic design. Designed by Gensler San Diego, with construction led by Dempsey Construction and landscaping by Carson Douglas Landscape Architect, this 242,000-square-foot project redefines how architecture can harmonize with nature to create an environment that nurtures well-being and community. The development is anchored by large custom planters from Planters Unlimited, enhancing its connection to the natural surroundings.

THE CORE OF BIOPHILIC DESIGN

Biophilic design is rooted in the idea of reconnecting humans with nature through the built environment. This concept shows that exposure to natural elements enhances mental health, increases productivity, and fosters a sense of harmony. The Sandbox leverages these principles by organizing the site around substantial public open space—a design choice that prioritizes human connection to nature and community.

A GATEWAY TO CONNECTION: THE OPEN SPACE PLAZA

The Sandbox's open space plaza links Highway 101 to Sierra Avenue, blending nature and architecture to foster connection and relaxation. With lush plantings and dynamic layouts, it enhances urban flow while creating a diverse, evolving architectural experience.





ARCHITECTURAL DIVERSITY MEETS NATURAL INTEGRATION

Each building within The Sandbox, Solana Beach boasts its own unique style, creating an eclectic architectural tapestry that mirrors the natural diversity of the surrounding environment. This design strategy also serves to emphasize individuality while maintaining cohesion through shared biophilic elements such as green spaces, natural light, and outdoor connectivity.

The use of custom planters from Planters Unlimited amplifies this connection to nature. The Modern Fiberglass Planters, with their sleek lines and minimalist design, seamlessly integrate with the project's contemporary aesthetic while providing functional greenery that softens the urban landscape. Meanwhile, the Madera Planters—designed to emulate the warmth and texture of natural wood—add an organic touch that enhances the sense of connection to the surrounding coastal environment.

LANDSCAPING THAT BREATHES LIFE INTO DESIGN

Carson Douglas Landscape Architect played a pivotal role in weaving nature throughout The Sandbox. The landscaping features a mix of native and adaptive plant species, chosen for their ability to thrive in the local climate while minimizing water use. This sustainable approach not only aligns with the project's biophilic goals but also enhances its aesthetic appeal, creating spaces that are as visually striking as they are environmentally conscious.

Strategically placed greenery frames the plaza, softens building facades, and provides shaded areas for rest and reflection. The large planters, supplied by Planters Unlimited, are integral to this vision. By acting as both functional and decorative elements, these planters create opportunities for greenery to flourish in areas where traditional planting might be challenging, such as on hardscaped surfaces or near building entrances.



Customization Capabilities of Planters Unlimited

Planters Unlimited's role in The Sandbox project extends beyond standard planters—our custom solutions help shape dynamic, functional spaces. We specialize in high-quality, made-to-order planters across a variety of materials, including fiberglass, fiberstone, and Corten steel, offering modular planter systems that define spaces, support stormwater management, and enhance urban landscapes. Our [Corten Steel planters](#), known for their striking patina and durability, bring a bold aesthetic to outdoor environments. With fully customizable sizes, integrated lighting, seating, and drainage solutions, our modular systems provide endless possibilities for tailored, high-performance designs.

With a knowledgeable and adaptable team, Planters Unlimited has a proven track record of delivering durable, high-quality products on time, ensuring smooth collaboration and project success. This expertise empowers designers and architects to push creative boundaries, blending natural elements seamlessly into diverse environments.





A Sustainable Future

The Sandbox exemplifies how biophilic design and sustainability can coexist in harmony. The inclusion of natural elements throughout the development reduces the urban heat island effect, improves air quality, and creates a welcoming environment for both people and local wildlife. The decision to use durable, lightweight fiberglass planters further supports this commitment to sustainability by ensuring long-lasting, low-maintenance solutions that complement the project's green ethos.

Community and Wellness at the Forefront

At its core, The Sandbox is more than a mixed-use development; it's a community hub that fosters connection, creativity, and well-being. By integrating restaurants, retail spaces, luxury apartments, and offices into a cohesive design centered around biophilia, the project creates a space where people can live, work, and play in harmony with nature.

The open space plaza encourages social interaction, while the thoughtful use of landscaping and planters creates pockets of tranquility where individuals can unwind. This balance between activity and rest reflects the holistic nature of biophilic design, which seeks to support all aspects of human life.

A Model for Future Developments

The Solana Beach Project stands as a testament to the transformative power of biophilic design in the built environment. By prioritizing natural integration and architectural diversity, The Sandbox demonstrates how urban developments can enhance quality of life while fostering a deep connection to the natural world. It's a model for future projects, showcasing how collaboration between visionary architects like Gensler, skilled builders like Dempsey Construction, and innovative landscape architects like Carson Douglas can result in spaces that inspire and uplift.

Final Thoughts

Achieving biophilia in the built environment requires thoughtful planning, collaboration, and a commitment to harmonizing design with nature. The Sandbox in Solana Beach exemplifies this approach, offering a dynamic space where personal expression, sustainability, and community converge. With its innovative use of custom planters from Planters Unlimited, sustainable landscaping by Carson Douglas, and architectural excellence by Gensler and Dempsey Construction, The Sandbox sets a new standard for biophilic design. It's not just a development—it's a living, breathing example of how spaces can nurture the soul and connect us to the natural world.



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6056 Corte Del Cedro
Carlsbad, Ca 92011
[1-888-320-0626](tel:1-888-320-0626)
sales@plantersunlimited.com

