

Kudos Come to San Diego Landscape Architect



The paseo in IQHQ Research and Development District (RaDD) is among the projects cited by the American Society of Landscape Architects in honoring Dillon Diers (pictured). Photo courtesy of the American Society of Landscape Architects

ARCHITECTURE: Diers Named Fellow by Prestigious Society

■ By RAY HUARD

SAN DIEGO – Ever since he was a child, Dillon Diers said that he felt a deep connection to nature and the environment.

"I grew up in Northern California on a dirt road in the Sierra Nevadas, and San Diego is my second home, where my grandparents were in Bay Park. I spent a lot of time in Tahoe, as well with my parents," said Diers, a partner and design leader with OJB Landscape Architecture.

"I was able to travel all around the country, spending a lot of time in national parks, a lot of time on hiking trails," Diers said.

His work "was always driven and connected to the natural environment."

"I made a big commitment to myself to make a big impact on my community, to really bring a strong sense of nature" said Diers, who was recently chosen as a fellow of the American Society of Landscape Architects, one of 36 landscape architects honored "for their outstanding contributions to the landscape architecture profession and society."

"It's always humbling to be recognized by your peers," Diers said of the award.

In announcing the award, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), wrote that Diers "exemplifies excellence, leadership, and a deep commitment to fostering inclusive, resilient, and sustainable communities."

"Diers' elevation to ASLA's 2026 Council of Fellows is one of the highest of the profession's honors, recognizing individuals whose works, leadership and service have made a

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lasting impact over time," the society wrote. "Through a career defined by innovation, environmental responsibility, and design excellence, Dillon Diers has expanded the possibilities of landscape architecture and created



Dillon Diers at work. Photo courtesy of the American Society of Landscape Architects

enduring landscapes that served both people and the planet."

Notable projects designed by Diers were the landscaping for IQHQ's Research and Development District (RaDD) on the downtown San Diego bayfront, the proposed Seaport San Diego along the city bayfront, Sunnylands Center and Gardens in Rancho Mirage, Klyde Warren Park in Dallas, and Warner Brothers Second Century in Burbank.

Dynamic Shift

RaDD includes a park and a paseo built on top of a parking garage.

With RaDD, "We were able to push the parameters of construction," Diers said. "We're able to bring the urban fabric back to the waterfront and that paseo and the park itself is a really impressive experience."

Among the features of RaDD that were noted by ASLA in its 2026 Design Awards in Landscape Architecture was walkway paving "delineated with complementary colors that define more intimate gathering spaces along the paseo."

"Planters with embedded seating in warm natural materials encourage visitors to linger in shaded moments, while retail spaces are engaged with landscape for activation," ASLA wrote. "Sea walls pair with movable furniture and fire pits to create an active environment."

Diers also worked as a consultant with Safdie Rabines architects in designing East Village Green, a \$79.6 million park in East Village scheduled to open in August.

The 4.1-acre community park includes a 13,600-square-foot community center and an underground parking garage at 13th and G streets, a children's play area at F and 13th streets, a dog park at 14th and G streets, and

a \$1.5-million outdoor performance venue along 13th Street.

"East Village is really thirsting for that environment," Diers said.

Designed to evoke the feel of an impressionist painting, with 53,000 plants and trees along meandering walkways, Sunnylands Center and Gardens has hosted meetings between world leaders, including President Barack Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Sunnylands Center "was one of my first projects where I was really pushed by the clients to make a really meaningful project," Diers said.

The 15-acre Sunnylands Center & Gardens is an extension of the 200-acre desert retreat of the late publisher, diplomat, and philanthropist Ambassador Walter Annenberg and his wife Leonore.

As described by Diers on his LinkedIn profile, Sunnylands was sited to take advantage of impressive views to the mountains beyond. The Center is organized around a 15,000-square-foot sq. ft. LEED gold-rated building that accommodates docent-led tours of the estate, educational exhibits, receptions, cafe, exhibition space, theater, and a gift shop.

Visitors entering the site move through a richly planted entry drive before arriving at the Center's formal auto court. At the rear of the building, twin reflection basins flank the formal plaza that overlooks the function lawn and desert gardens beyond. A sweeping promenade leads visitors past a maze garden, reflection garden and interpretive paths through the native landscape.

With the Warner Brothers project, ASLA wrote that the 11-acre campus design "prioritizes employee health and wellness, promoting the integration of outdoor experiences and ex-

ploration with traditional workplace culture. This is especially impactful in the creative studio environment."

Diers got his first exposure to design in high school, when he took a drafting class at the urging of his father, an English teacher who thought it would improve Diers' handwriting. His mother was an elementary school teacher.

"Originally, I was driven to architecture, but I met a landscape architect," Diers said.

As a result of that encounter, Diers switched his focus, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in landscape architecture from California State Polytechnic University Pomona.

Since he started his career 20 years ago as an associate in OJB's Solana Beach office, landscape has moved from being an afterthought to an integral part of development projects.

"There certainly was a dynamic shift around the (COVID-19) pandemic in terms of the value that communities are putting on parks and open space," Diers said, adding that clients are willing to invest more in landscaping as a critical amenity to their projects. ■

American Society of Landscape Architects

FOUNDED: 1899

HEADQUARTERS: Washington, DC

CEO: Torey Carter-Conneen

BUSINESS: professional association of landscape architects

MEMBERS: 18,000

WEBSITE: www.asla.org

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NOTABLE: The American Society of Landscape Architects has 48 chapters in the U.S., including San Diego, and chapters in 42 countries