

Insight

## SPORT VENUES CAN TRANSFORM COMMUNITIES

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Exploring downtown San Diego between sessions at the Urban Land Institute's Spring Meeting in May, I discovered PETCO Park. Home of Major League Baseball's San Diego Padres, the stadium is nestled among high-rise hotels and restored warehouses so that you can't see it from outside. In fact, you'd never know it was there. With PETCO Park, the geniuses at Populous (formerly HOK Sports), in association with architect Antoine Predock, have created a real diamond that has made me completely reconsider my distaste for sports architecture. Respecting the fantastic city where it resides, the 42,000-seat arena is porous, modulated, and fully integrated into the transit system, providing a model for the urban sports venue as an architectural and economic intervention.

Architects of other venues acknowledge the massive scale of these kinds of structures by constructing them as standalone developments, with iconic profiles and distinctive skins. The architectural team for PETCO Park rejected the concept of a pure, iconic mass entirely, and instead scattered support areas and retail outside the stadium envelope. They then violated the rings of grandstands on the interior by integrating a historic warehouse structure, using the corner of it as the foul ball line. They even penetrated the volume with view corridors into the bowl at sidewalk level, making it feel like you could walk right on to the field.

PETCO Park offers ample pre- and post-game leisure opportunities at bars and restaurants, as well as various waterfront activities. One of the stadium's best features



is Park at the Park, a pre-game picnic spot and seating area that's perfect for families whose small children might have a hard time sitting still through nine innings. And I realized that PETCO Park has conquered another demographic when I saw a line of cheerful teenagers waiting at the ticket window before the Padres/Nationals game — a fun thing to do on a Thursday night that doesn't involve a smartphone. What's more, because the stadium envelope is modulated, fans can enjoy stunning views of the skyline and mountains from the stands, and local residents can watch games from their balconies.

There's no doubt that the additional billions in capital investment that PETCO Park has attracted to the area will keep it active and exciting for many decades to come. And, thanks to the courageous developers, Hines Interest, and their visionary team of architects and designers, the modesty of this architectural approach means you'll never see an iconic profile of it being used as a shorthand logo for the city of San Diego. This architecture is the kind that is branded on the heart.

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**HOME RUN**  
San Diego's PETCO Park baseball stadium has been sympathetically designed to blend in with its urban context