

## NEW YORK, NY

### Landscape Forms Elements:

Custom Benches & Planters

### Design Partners:

Brad Ascalon, Times Square Alliance

The 2018 Times Square Design Lab, hosted by Times Square Alliance, featured the Island Collection, designed by industrial designer Brad Ascalon of Brad Ascalon Studio NYC and manufactured by Landscape Forms' Studio 431.

Island Collection is a modular system of double-diamond shapes offered in three different heights. The pieces can be arranged systematically or organically. Varying heights create boundaries and invite people to approach and interact differently. Tall planters provide backrests. Individual or nested seats, long linear arrangements of benches, or small groupings suggest individual or group use and activities. Color makes the arrangements playful or understated, and planters in different heights create cascades of greenery.

"From the moment Brad presented his Design Lab submission to the Alliance, we knew it was going to work," says Times Square Alliance VP of Finance and Administration Jerome Barth. "It opened possibilities for me as a manager of public space. It didn't lock us into any specific form. It creates place and is flexible as needs change." It also had potential for working within the constraints of the Times Square Plaza. "Times Square is both big and small," explains Barth. "It is an expansive area but filled with people, so we can't install furniture that becomes an obstacle to the flow of people." The Alliance also felt strongly that the successful design would introduce color and nature into the concrete grays of Times Square's streets and buildings. "The Island Collection incorporates all these things," says Barth. "It's given visitors something that is friendly and comforting within the hustle and bustle of Times Square."

Designing for a specific and known site was a new experience for Ascalon Studio NYC. "Usually we design things while hypothesizing about the site in which they will find a place," he explains. "But Times Square was a very real place with very real problems we had to design around. It is inundated with people and foot traffic. The design brief outlined the need to address the pedestrian space and entertainment space that coexist in Times Square. That's where we started problem solving: The idea was to separate these activities with a barrier that was functional, utilitarian, yet also inviting."

Ascalon's design introduces nature into Times Square, something the Alliance felt important in transforming Times Square. "A mini forest in the middle of Times Square was the concept," says Ascalon. Stepped planter heights create lush cascades of greenery. "We wanted to introduce natural



elements into this bustling place and juxtapose greenery, concrete, and glass.”

Ascalon relishes products that give landscape designers a say, and the versatility of Island Collection’s offers them freedom to create a variety of applications in a variety of scales. “One or two pieces create a small moment; 15 to 20 pieces create an event,” explains Ascalon.

Barth had worked with Studio 431 previously and knew it was a good fit for the project, one which called for Studio 431’s engineering and manufacturing expertise. “Studio 431 and Brad are working at the cutting edge of talent and capability in terms of producing beautiful items that are functional and well thought out,” he explains. “They have a genuine passion for these designs; it’s not simply the execution of a product order.” The Island Collection pieces were designed to be completely seamless, but the process of welding the forms together caused the panels to deflect and deform. Studio 431 came up with a solution: it built a bracing structure inside the pieces that retains both their shape during welding and their beautiful seamless form. “The Island design required engineering expertise to become a real product,” says Ascalon. “A simple design isn’t always simple to manufacture. Times Square Alliance made the right choice in selecting Studio 431 to develop the Island Collection.”

Manufacturing efficiency was another contribution from Studio 431. The original design called for a three-inch radius on the pieces’ corners, but the Studio 431 team recommended a slightly small radius to make the pieces easier to manufacture and more cost effective. “It turned out that a two-inch radius was perfect and looked great,” says Ascalon. “That decision improved the cost of Island Collection.” With an eye to longevity, Studio 431 also suggested adding a base pedestal to the units to prevent them from getting damaged when moved over time.

“I love what I do, which is to express the best ideas, not just my ideas, to create the best possible product. That’s where experts in other areas add value. Studio 431 contributed their ideas and made the product better. Times Square Alliance was appreciative of design and understood the problems Island solves,” says Ascalon. “I appreciate clients who are right there with us. It really was a true collaboration.”

Contact your Landscape Forms representative for more information about the Island Collection and how you can specify it for your project.

