

US Open

STUDIO 431

landscapeforms

QUEENS, NY

Landscape Forms Elements:

Custom Umpire Stand, Custom Player's Bench, Custom Line Judge Chair, Custom Cameramen's Bench

Design Partners:

Michael Graves Architecture & Design

Team Members:

USTA

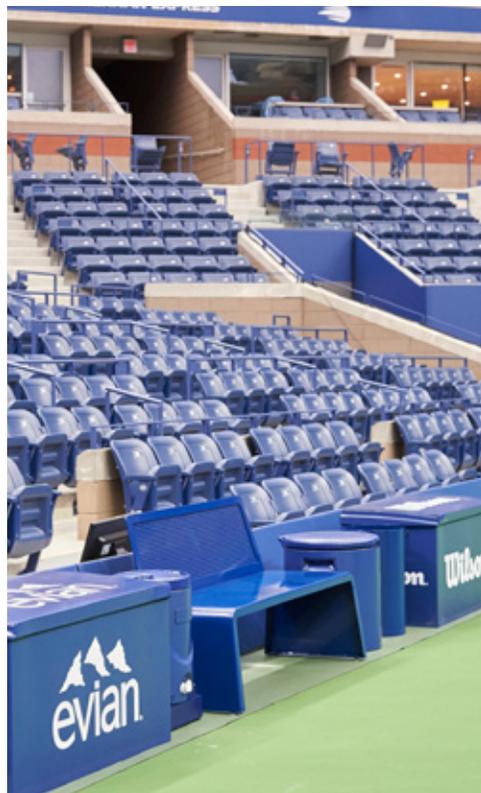
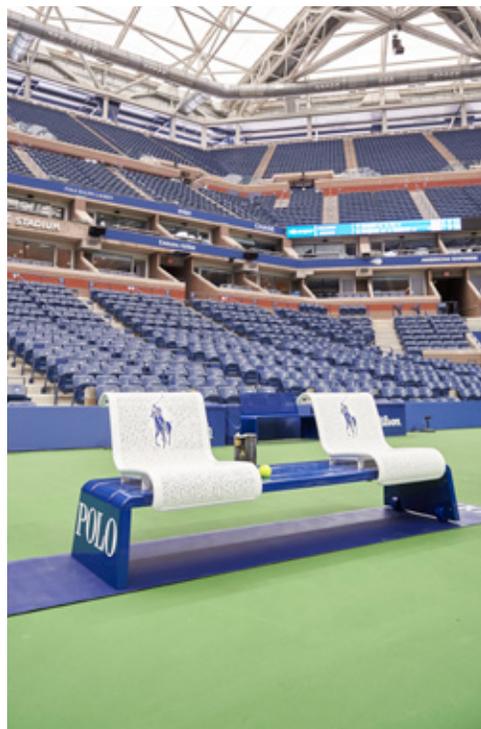
When Michael Graves Architecture & Design (MGA&D) took on the high-visibility project of redesigning courtscape furniture for the 2018 US Open, the team knew the pressure was on. "The US Open is the grandest of the Grand Slams," says Donald Strum, principal and lead designer on the project. "It is a premium brand and celebrity-filled event. The furniture had to deliver on that brand experience."

The new furniture was part of a rebranding of the USTA coordinated with the celebration of the US Open's 50th anniversary and, for two weeks, all eyes would be on the tennis center's four show courts. "It was a fast-track, important, and complex project with multiple levels of details and stakeholders," said Robert Van Varick, MGA&D principal and lead researcher on the project. "We had to consider the user experience through the lens of players, officials, marketing, sponsors, facilities, network, spectators in the stands and watching on TV, and camera angles."

The firm reached out to Landscape Forms' Studio 431 for product development and manufacturing help, knowing that Studio 431 had the expertise needed to meet both the deadline and MGA&D's high standards. "Having Studio 431 as a partner was great," says MGA&D project manager Jessica Hurwit. "Because the process was so fast, we needed to work with engineers we could trust and who valued design intent as much as manufacturing results. The continual dialogue we had along the way was essential; we were figuring things out together. It's how we work, and we found a partner who worked the same way."

Studio 431 was able to draw on the resources of Landscape Forms, bolstering engineering support to bring umpires' stands, players' benches, line umpires' chairs, and cameramen's benches to completion by late August. Says Studio 431's Darin Piippo, "Working with product design experts like MGA&D was critical. We had a fluid flow of conversation back and forth that built trust between our two teams."

The NYC skyline frames the US Open campus, and the MGA&D team wanted to introduce elements of the city to the courtside.



“The grandiose aspect of forced perspective when one looks at skyscrapers is reflected in the design of the umpire stand,” says Strum. The stand also echoes the cantilevered architecture of NYC’s iconic Whitney Museum and 30 Hudson Yards development.

The players’ benches call to mind benches that dot parks throughout NYC’s boroughs. Their design was a departure from the director’s chairs previously on the courts. “Our bench design is a diaphanous foundation of a structure that supports a person, belongings, and rackets but also reflects the fluidity of the players,” says Strum. “The benches are a reductive design of what was necessary. Players didn’t need arms on the seats, for example. Benches without arms provide more access and movement.”

Studio 431’s engineering expertise was called on to bring MGA&D’s design concept for the players’ benches to life. “A graceful, simple form is often more difficult to execute,” says Piippo. “We thoroughly investigated the perforated metal surfaces to ensure the seats were supportive but also thin enough to have some flex. We were keenly aware of the caliber of the athletes who would be sitting on them and the high expectations of all involved.”

The line umpire chairs required a different approach compared to the players’ benches. “Line umpires spend a lot of time in the chairs,” says MGA&D product designer Vladimir Anokhin. “The chairs had to be a comfortable sit and include arms. We also learned that line judges bring personal items with them. Our final design incorporated a cubby underneath the seat to store smaller items and help to give the courts a cleaner appearance.”

While cameramen’s bench design seemed straightforward—a backless bench—it posed a last-minute challenge. “We learned that photographer regulations call for a backrest,” says Strum. “Studio 431 was a champion and engineered a back that could be added to the backless bench. We course-corrected as we went, and pushed through as a team.”

Next year, the USTA will roll out the new court furniture to the outer courts at the USTA Billie Jean King Tennis Center. The MGA&D and Studio 431 teams look at the new furniture debuted at the 2018 US Open as real-time use prototypes that will allow revisions to be incorporated into the furniture for future courts. “How cool is it that we could do live research while watching television?” says MGA&D manager Ben Wintner, who also conducted research on the project.

“When we said yes to this project, there was big pressure,” says Wintner. “I really question if the beautiful results would have been possible had we worked with anyone other than Studio 431. The project was great from a visibility standpoint, but one of the best takeaways was partnering with Landscape Forms, another company that plays at the top of its game.”

