

SKATEPARKS

KILLER CONCRETE BOWLS AND GNARLY VERTICAL WALLS

BY PAT KETCHUM





TWO CAL POLY LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT GRADS are bringing killer concrete bowls and gnarly vertical walls to communities all over the world.

Zack Wormhoudt (LA '93) and **Craig Waltz (LA '04)** are paving the way for one of the fastest growing sports among teenagers – skateboarding.

Skateboard parks designed by their company now grace cities as far away as the port of Penzance in England and the city of Tel-Aviv in Israel. Their newest one is closer to home – the Mike Fox Skatepark, a \$1.3-million, 15,000-square-foot facility along the San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz.

Though Wormhoudt and Waltz share an alma mater, an obsession with surfing, and even their hometown, the pair didn't meet as students at Cal Poly or even on the beaches of Santa Cruz.

A phone call set the wheels in motion for their partnership in 2006. Wormhoudt, who had been designing skate and bike parks for nearly a decade alongside his father, picked up the phone one day.

On the other end was Waltz, armed with a senior project he knew would grab Wormhoudt's attention, a comprehensive video and skate park design that earned him an A-plus at Cal Poly. As he hoped, it landed him the job of his dreams on the design team that has crafted nearly 100 public and private parks worldwide.

According to Wormhoudt, city governments are starting to realize that skateboarding is a great sport for contemporary youth, just like soccer, baseball and football. "Also, if a city doesn't have a skate park, then the city becomes a skate park," he said.

Benches, planters, curbs, walls, and even the steps of city hall became choice turf for "boarders" in the late '70s when acrobatic sidewalk surfing was born. This posed a hazard to pedestrians and vehicles.

Today, the crooked grinds, kick-flips, wall-rides and indy grabs that are performed at official sporting events such as the X-Games pose no danger to the public – thanks to the vision and safety consciousness of designers like Wormhoudt and Waltz, as well as laws adopted by California in 1998 that eliminated much of the liability for municipalities that operate public skate parks.

"Most skateboarders are graceful athletes who defy the old stereotype of aggressive urban guerilla," Wormhoudt explains. "The perception of them is changing, along with laws that make public parks a viable investment for a community."

The sport's climb to respectability may even get a jump start soon. According to recent speculation on blogs, skateboarding may even follow the path of its extreme sport cousin, snowboarding, and become an Olympic event. □