

## Interior Finishes on a Budget

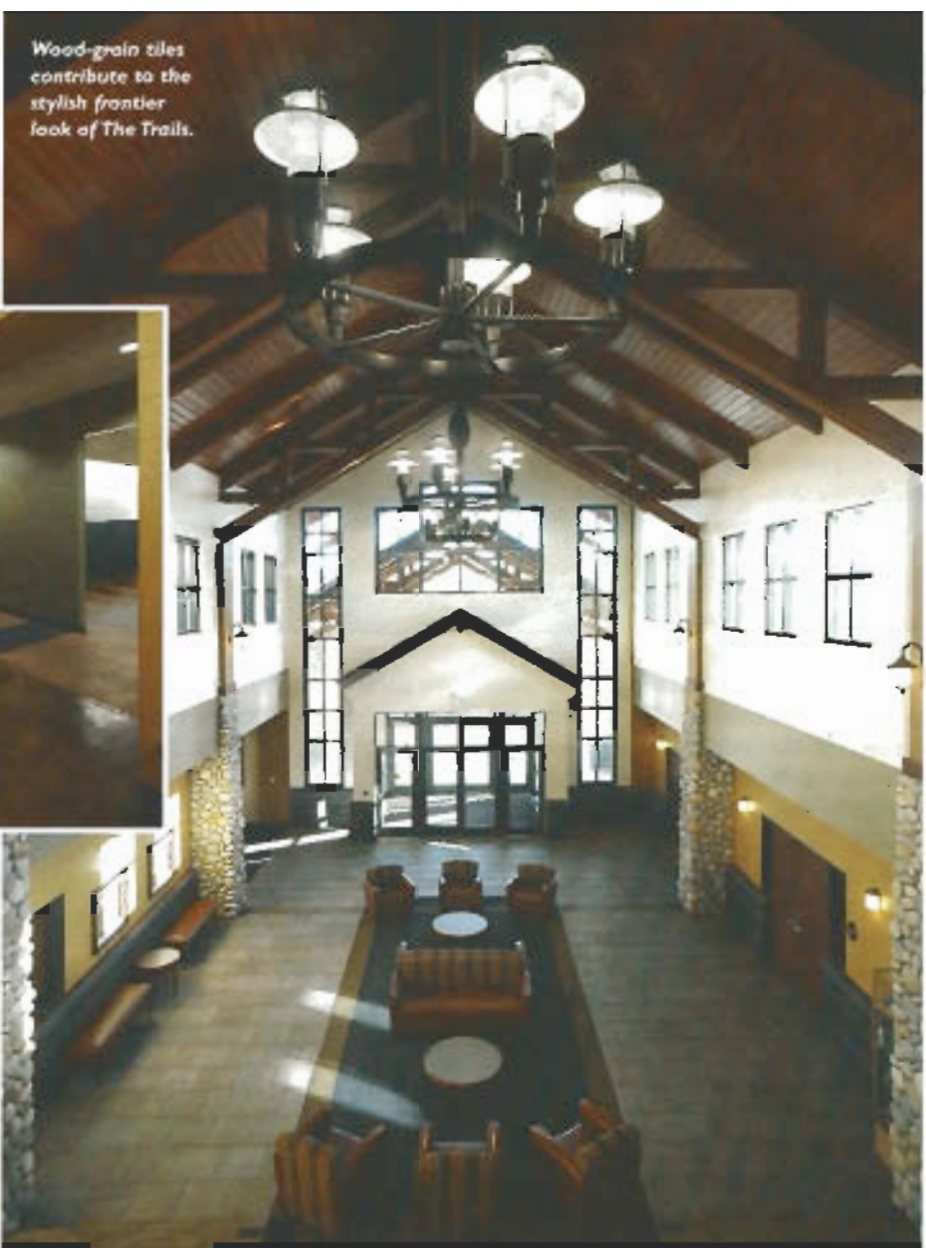
Christell Leonard

You've probably heard the phrase "Champagne taste on a beer budget." How about "a silk purse out of a sow's ear"? Superior finishes are plentiful when your budget is plenty big. But when recreation facilities are designed within a strict budget, how do you jazz it up without breaking the bank?

The main concerns always have been durability and cost of materials when designing interiors for community recreation centers. In the past, the aesthetic standard for interior finishes in public recreation centers has been fairly low. However, in the last decade there has been an increasing trend to upgrade finishes and amenities in municipal facilities. More and more, the members of parks and recreation groups have come to expect a high level of interior design and theming within their centers. The quandary is that, despite high expectations for interior design, the construction budgets for these projects still are frequently constrained. This requires the design team to come up with new and creative ways to use durable and inexpensive products to generate that "Champagne finish" that clients and users eagerly anticipate.

Over the past quarter century, the gap between the aesthetic quality of the interior finishes of both private health clubs and public recreation centers has continued to narrow.

"No longer can architects design 'your grandpa's recreation facility,'" says architect David Sprague of Ohlson Lavoie Collaborative (OLC) in Denver. "Customers' expectations today for programs, amenities and look lean much more toward private clubs than simple community rec rooms."



Wood-grain tiles contribute to the stylish frontier look of The Trails.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ED LACASSE PHOTOGRAPHY

Having said that, most recreation centers cannot afford all of the niceties of a private fitness club such as much of the elaborate tile pattern work that is most often seen in the wet areas and locker rooms. An alternative to tile for a public facility is integral color and stained concrete floors. Today, there are many innovative and fun ways to use concrete. For example, at The Trails Recreation Center in Centennial, Colo., different colors in integral color concrete, combined with an interesting scoring pattern throughout the floors of the locker rooms and the pool decks, combines high-end design with cost-controlled function.

Meanwhile, at the West River Community Center in Dickinson, N.D., the parks and recreation board expressed a desire to somehow tie in the history of the area's dinosaur fossil discoveries with the theming for the interiors of their new recreation center. The designer's solution to this request was to use an integral color concrete floor with scoring patterns and a custom stamp of a dinosaur footprint in the pool deck. It's fun for kids to emerge from the locker rooms into the leisure pool area and see huge dinosaur footprints stomping their way across the pool deck. The use of colored concrete, instead of tile in these wet areas can be a great cost savings but is still very durable and attractive.

High-impact gypsum wallboard is another product that has become more prevalent in recreation centers. Once only used on the lower portions of walls in gymnasiums, it is now being used in other areas that receive high amounts of abuse. The cost of this high-impact gypsum board has continued to decrease and now is comparable to regular gypsum board.

Above left and below: Integral color concrete flooring throughout the locker rooms and pool decks helps establish a high-end look at The Trails Recreation Center in Centennial, Colo.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ED LACASSE PHOTOGRAPHY



APEX Center Arvada, CO



Trust Soft Play to be your preferred playground supplier.

- Global leader in contained play
- Custom designed play environments
- Meets and exceeds ASTM F1918 safety standards

To find your local consultant, call or visit us online today!

**888.752.9582**  
**www.softplay.com**



Soft Play L.L.C. • Charlotte, NC, USA  
tel. 704.875.6550 • fax. 704.875.6561



Write 114 on reader inquiry fax card

Exposed CMU walls always have been a staple in recreation centers. Historically, these exposed masonry walls were simply painted over with one, maybe two colors of paint at the most. Now, we are seeing more interesting combinations of split-faced and ground-face CMU blocks being used to create striking textural and banding effects. Also, different colors of CMU blocks are used, eliminating the need for painting.

At the West River Community Center, this type of design is very effective.

"Early in the design stage, the client wanted a warm and expressive environment for this regionally significant project, but one that would be achievable within their budget," explains Brian Beckler, OLC project designer. "We chose integral colored masonry in lieu of standard painted concrete block. For a minimal additional cost, West River Community Center achieved a dramatic design effect without breaking the bank."

The use of varying textures and colors in the exposed block gives the walls an upgraded look at a very small cost increase.

PHOTO COURTESY OF FOUNDATION PHOTOGRAPHY - JOHANNA JONHE



At the West River Community Center in Dickinson, N.D., different colors of CMU blocks create a striped custom look.

design without additional effects. There doesn't need to be a lot of expensive, painted wall graphics in these areas to make them visually exciting. Instead, contrasting paint color could be used on the walls in key areas.

These are only a few of the solutions that balance creative size and cost control when designing interiors. Though it's always a good idea to search for new, breakthrough products that are durable, cost-effective and attractive, don't be afraid to examine tried-and-true existing products that can be used in innovative and exciting ways. Stained concrete, integral masonry and even paint will give your facility the upgraded look that your members have come to expect.

*Christell Leonard is an associate principal and senior interior designer for Ohlson Lavoie Collaborative in Denver. For more information, visit [www.OhlsonLavoieCollaborative.com](http://www.OhlsonLavoieCollaborative.com).*

### Aim for impact

Choosing where to spend money on interior finishes so that they will have the most impact is important on any project, but especially for public recreation centers. When the budget is limited, there are usually only a few key areas where some extra money can be spent.

At The Trails Recreation Center, the design team and the client wanted the lobby/atrium area to be a focal point for the facility. The theme for The Trails embodies Centennial's rich history involving early settlers and pioneers. A medium-cost porcelain tile was used on the floors throughout most of the lobby. However, a more expensive accent tile that resembles wood planking was used in conjunction with the medium-priced tile. Also in the lobby, designers used man-made river rocks and stone to accent the tapered columns that march down the main axis of the atrium. Even though there are relatively small amounts of this river rock and the wood-look tile, the impact on the whole design is huge. These small investments bring the pioneer theme to life and set the tone for the entire center from the entryway forward.

Yet another way to generate visual interest at very little cost is by using vibrant paint colors on walls. Choosing key accent walls to feature an intense color that is in contrast to the surrounding colors is a dynamic effect that is visually appealing to users.

The aquatics areas at recreation centers are always a significant and highly used component. Most centers are family-oriented, with high expectations for theming and visual stimulation. Many of the water slides, spray gardens and play structures come in a variety of different colors. Often, these structures are interesting enough by themselves, so that not much more money needs to be spent on the interior finishes around them. Choosing bright colors for these elements that coordinate with the theme and color palette of the entire facility can create striking

For a printable version of this story, visit [www.recmanagement.com](http://www.recmanagement.com)

# BETTER THAN THE REAL THING

## THE ROCK

**LOOKS LIKE ROCK. CLIMBS LIKE ROCK. TOUGH AS ROCK.**

Kids can't resist The Rock, the newest climbing innovation from Landscape Structures. With its amazingly realistic climbing surface, it stimulates creative play for kids of all ages. It's a natural choice for your park, playground or campground. The Rock can be used solo or with your other equipment. Even better, it's fast to install, built to last for decades and virtually maintenance-free!

**CALL TODAY FOR YOUR FREE COPY OF THE ROCK VIDEO.**

**LANDSCAPE STRUCTURES INC.**  
1.888.438.6574 [PLAYLS1.COM](http://PLAYLS1.COM)