

METROPOLIS



CONNECT

One of the cornerstone pieces of the Metro40 collection, the bus shelter has dramatic angles.

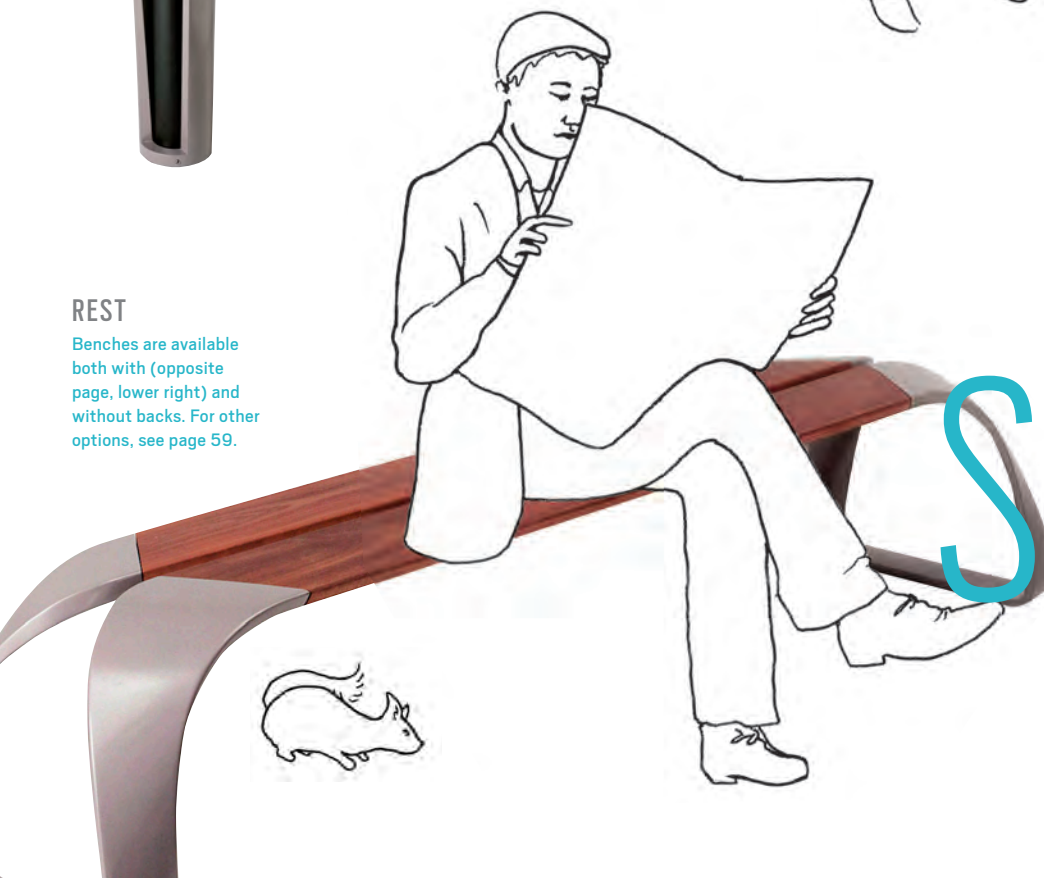


STOP

The full-service, eight-piece collection includes a bollard.

REST

Benches are available both with (opposite page, lower right) and without backs. For other options, see page 59.



Taking
TO THE
STREETS



GLO

The pathway and streetlight versions of the LED fixture are Landscape Forms's first foray into lighting.

With auspicious timing, Landscape Forms launches its first transit-oriented furniture collection.

by
David Sokol

Drawings by
Sarah Knotz

Stimulus funding was on nobody's mind in 2006, when Landscape Forms hatched the program description for Metro40, a transit-oriented collection of street furniture, by BMW Group DesignworksUSA, that went on sale last month. And despite much anticipation, our cities have not, so far, been transformed by federal dollars. "I see an awful lot of short-term stimulus money going into fixing potholes," says Bill Main, the president of Landscape Forms. He adds, however, that the next phase of funding for shovel-ready-infrastructure projects may have streetscape applications. If so, the Kalamazoo, Michigan-based outdoor-furniture manufacturer will find itself handily positioned for the changing marketplace.

Until 2000, Landscape Forms largely wooed suburban corporate campuses, particularly in Silicon Valley. Then the company's transactions started to shift

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toward the public sector, beginning with health-care clients and school campuses, which favored the Wellspring and 35 collections. “Now it seems that communities are aware of that same thing—that they can lure investment, and particularly the young creative class of citizen that is so important to attracting companies, with their own facilities,” Main says. In 2006, for example, the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority invited Landscape Forms to participate in the concept phases of its Euclid Corridor Transportation Project. Main cites similar urban projects, such as Pearl District in Portland, Oregon, Victory Center in Dallas, and Houston’s light-rail system, as evidence of increasing

demand for a line like Metro40, which includes a transit shelter, lighting, benches, signage, a bollard, a bike rack, and trash receptacles.

In addition to capitalizing on the transit and streetscape projects that are in the works nationwide, Landscape Forms has its sights set on even bigger markets. “We wanted a product that had an international design vocabulary suitable to Europe, Asia, or the U.S. so that we could expand the business with this product,” says Richard Heriford, the vice president of sales and marketing. Metro40, therefore, needed to be designed for light assembly, since the company didn’t want to open fully outfitted factories in new overseas markets.

To meet these criteria, Landscape Forms tapped Sonja Schiefer, a designer who had previously worked on the 35 collection while on staff at Frog Design. By 2007, Schiefer was at DesignworksUSA, which prototyped three versions of the new eight-piece collection before settling on one called Mobius that was

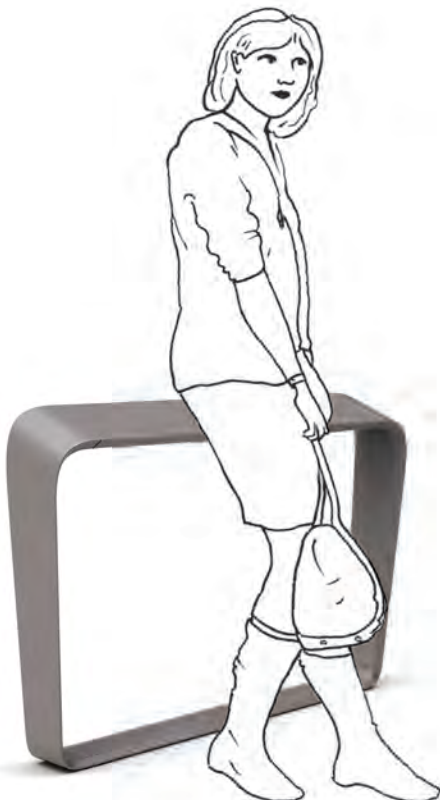


Sonja Schiefer, of DesignworksUSA, is responsible for Metro40’s dramatic shapes.



COLLECT

Distinct colors and openings help differentiate trash and recycling containers (above).

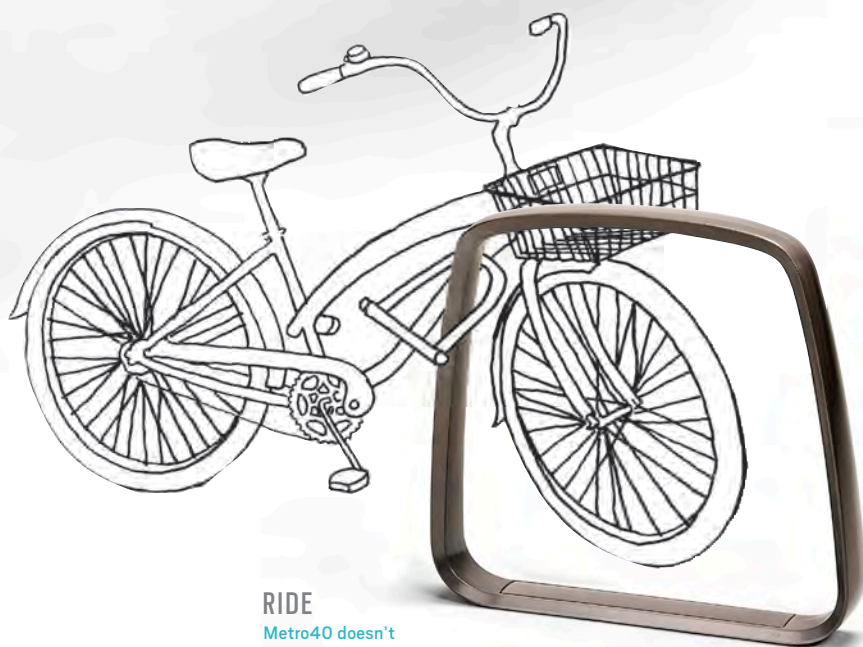




In addition to optional backs, benches can be ordered with dividers, either in all aluminum or with wood.



The leaning bar is the simplest offering for resting.



RIDE

Metro40 doesn't overlook the increasingly essential bicycle rack.

inspired by freeway intersections. Its aluminum forms, some of which feature glass and wood elements, twist in uninterrupted loops. "The function of Metro40 is to enhance the experience for people in motion," says Verena Kloos, the president of DesignworksUSA. "So its form reflects the hallmarks of modern travel—movement and flow, continuity and change. The accelerated curves reflect a sense of energy as well as the idea of staying mobile and connected."

But not all Möbius strips are created equal. "You want a cohesive yet balanced family, so some pieces have to be more expressive than others," Schiefer says. Two first-time products for Landscape Forms play such leading roles. Connect,

the enclosed shelter, has a sharp curve of cast aluminum in each corner, while its optional interior benches and leaning bars have the less emphatic outlines shared by much of the rest of the collection. Meanwhile, the canopies of the 3- and 12-foot-high Glo luminaires evoke torqued eye hooks. Schiefer had already determined that shape when the Metro40 team brought in the Boulder, Colorado-based lighting-design firm Clanton & Associates in late 2007, but it proved surprisingly accommodating in resolving technical issues. "A lot of manufacturers say LEDs last forever, so when they do fail, you have to replace the entire luminaire," says Dane Sanders, a **continued on page 81**

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principal with Clanton & Associates. Instead, Glo relies on removable components: a six-diode cartridge inconspicuously slips under the band in the footpath fixture, while the larger version appears to cradle a 48-diode cartridge. The design has other advantages as well. “Of the ten best-performing luminaires that we specify, the tall Glo performs better on vertical uniformity,” Sanders says, referring to the visual field that includes facial recognition.

Despite the technical challenges, having lighting in the collection was strategically important. “Creating an integrated product collection fits

“We don’t go through design school to select products well.”

with European thought,” Main says. “The industry there is structured to have lighting and furniture coming from one source.” The American industry may prove to be a tougher sell. Take the Mason Street Corridor, an \$81.9 million, five-mile stretch of bus rapid transit in Fort Collins, Colorado, that’s intended to relieve congestion. EDAW—now AECOM—will be managing this design-build project, which just went out for bid and should be completed in 2011. Brad Smith, a senior associate at the

design and planning studio, says that although Heriford’s salespeople have courted the project, he has already conceived a custom-built bus shelter that evokes the corridor’s railroad history. “It was something the city recognizes as being very important for branding the Mason Corridor,” he says. “We don’t go through design school to select products well.” But Smith allows that value engineering could lead him to pick the collection for Mason Street. “I’m not ruling out Metro40,” he says. He imagines that “engineer-centric” projects are more likely to rely on catalog purchases and that furniture replacements made possible by stimulus funding may boost those opportunities.

Toward that end, Landscape Forms is tracking federal programs such as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Grants Digest, which covers infrastructure projects, and the transit funds Small Starts and New Starts. Main describes the latter as “the government’s primary financial resource for supporting locally planned, implemented, and operated major transit capital investments.” That hardly means the company is abandoning the landscape architects, urban planners, and design professionals it has always served—and had in mind when it developed Metro40. “We hope to benefit from the stimulus package, but we wouldn’t design a product around a short-term program like that,” Main says. “We have a very long sales cycle, so we launch these products and sit and wait and hope.” ○

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