



DESERT PROMENADE

A HISTORIC CANAL IN CHANDLER, ARIZONA, GETS A SENSITIVE AND PEDESTRIAN-FRIENDLY FACE-LIFT.

ABOVE
Custom light boxes displaying colorized photographs of Chandler's history double as safety lighting.

BELOW
Before the redesign, the earthen canal was lined by invasive oleanders.



Chandler, Arizona, wouldn't exist without canals. Starting in the 1890s, a network of aboveground waterways channeled water from the Salt River and became the lifeblood of the town. Over time, most of the city's smaller lateral canals were paved over. But one survived, along Commonwealth Avenue near downtown Chandler, and was eventually listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Now that canal has a bold new identity that manages to both update and restore the waterway to a previous form. The improvement is part of a streetscape project led by Phoenix-based J2 Engineering and Environ-

mental Design that increases pedestrian safety and connectivity in Chandler's growing downtown core. Whereas rivers around the world are being renaturalized, the designers found that the most environmentally and culturally sensitive solution here was to channelize the canal, both because it originally was concrete-lined and also because the waterway continues to serve as an important conveyance channel, carrying the reclaimed water that irrigates the San Marcos golf course.

The most visually striking element of the redesign is a custom blue-painted fence that runs between the adjacent resort and a new public promenade, which lines most of an 800-foot path from the new Dakota Street to Chandler Park. The fence, made of angled steel panels, is located along the north side of the canal and replaces a long line of overgrown and invasive oleanders that had become a problem for the city and the resort alike, sucking up the canal's water and trapping trash and sediment.

Faced with severe space constraints—"We were talking about inches," recalls Kim Moyers, the city's cultural development director—and a budget of just \$2.5 million, the fence became a simple but eye-catching way to draw attention to the historic canal while also shielding the adjacent hotel

rooms from automobile headlights. The angled panels provide a sense of movement, while a series of six photographic panels display historic images of canal construction throughout the Salt River Valley. At night, the illuminated panels double as safety lighting. (A bridge crossing was also added midway along the length of the promenade so that pedestrians had access and egress options.)

Erica MacKenzie, ASLA, a landscape architect at J2 and the project's lead designer, says her team tried to make the path feel important, even luxurious. What appears to be a single shade of blue is actually five. The color gradually—and seamlessly—darkens as it approaches Chandler Park. The team tested color swatches in full sun to ensure they transitioned smoothly and detailed the fence so that each panel is like a pixel; the color changes one pixel at a time to create an almost imperceptible gradient.

Blue also bleeds into the pavement—in the form of recycled glass—and the LED panels. "Once we got those blue colors nailed down, we went in Photoshop and created layers of those exact same shades of blue," explains Denise Dunlop, ASLA, J2's project manager who is now with Dig Studio. "All of the images that are illuminated are from those originals, but instead of being sepia tones of brown or gray, they're all the shades of blue. They all tie into the overall theme." ●