

A growing trend to the overall appearance of shopping and lifestyle centers is shade structures

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For the past decade, outdoor shopping centers and lifestyle centers have continued on the trend of being built to resemble pedestrian-friendly city streets. Oftentimes they end up serving as a substitute "downtown" for communities without a town center. Certainly benches, trash receptacles, tree grates and planters are standard amenities for a successful shopping center's landscaping plan.

A growing trend to the overall appearance of shopping and lifestyle centers, however, is the addition of shade structures. Attractive shade structures increase the overall appeal of a shopping area and create a desire for the shopper to appreciate the surroundings. Ultimately, the result of a higher level of attractive surroundings is shoppers, diners and residents that stay longer.

Shade structures can act as sheltered areas to not only provide the shopper with relief from sun or rain but also, with properly located seating, a place to meet others or rest their weary limbs. Additionally, amphitheaters are being added to shopping centers as the central location for outdoor summer concerts. These open areas for entertainment draw the public and increase foot traffic; especially to restaurants for dinner. In order to accommodate the crowds and make people feel insulated from the outside world, it takes greater creativity and resourcefulness to create these open space areas with unique amenities.

Also popular is implementing the shade structures with shopping center logos. Branding can be a very important aspect for shopping centers and can certainly accommodate this feature on all shade structures.

Shade structures that incorporate shade fabric (as opposed to steel) roofs are also extremely popular. The durable fabrics are designed to block out up to 90% of harmful UV rays and keep temperatures up to 30 degrees cooler. There are also vinyl fabric options which are designed to stay up year-round and can include logos directly on the fabric.

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