

# Pools Manifesto

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It is a rare privilege to be part of an architectural firm whose craft is focused on community recreation facilities. Public swimming pools are dynamic civic buildings, made whole by the energy diverse citizens devote to them. As architects, we believe that this privilege comes bundled with a responsibility to deliver designs that serve, innovate and inspire. In and out of the water, we are dedicated to the notion that aquatic architecture can contribute to shaping strong and healthy communities.

The buildings designed by our firm, HCMA Architecture + Design, are the result of several decades of an iterative exploration of this aquatic building type, with each successive design informed by the public experience of those that preceded them. The notion that public pools and linked facilities can transform communities has shaped our work, leading to national and international recognition over the past twenty years.

This is a summary of our principles—as designers serving the public—for shaping aquatic architecture.

## 1. Every site and situation is unique

While repetitive “one size fits all” solutions once dominated the public swimming pool building type, these have been shown to ill serve their users. We are convinced pools must be carefully situated in both their social and their urban/environmental contexts. As designers we must look—to see the potential of a street, outlook or natural setting—but we must also listen—to hear the real, and not just apparent needs of users and clients. Visual insight married to social appropriateness resonates beyond site boundaries, informing design as a catalyst for positive community change.

## 2. Pay attention to detail in shaping healthy pool environments

Aquatic facilities are technically demanding buildings with specific performance criteria that need fulfillment at high levels. Aquatic architecture must conform to specific criteria from sports body, health board and public safety agencies, as well as challenging environmental conditions. Users deserve indoor aquatic experiences within tempered water and conditioned air of exceptional quality, with all details shaping a safe and engaging environment. The provision of abundant natural light and fresh air is key to this.

## 3. Delight and surprise pool users

We embrace an approach to aquatic architecture that recognizes the need to provide spaces that inspire, engage and delight their users. We use a variety of timeless design strategies that include bold colour, dynamic views, powerful visual forms and elements of surprise to provide memorable experiences that bring people back time and time again. Architectural details of pools must capture the spirit of play and amplify the pleasure of users.

## 4. Accessible for all

We believe one of our responsibilities is to design buildings that accommodate the widest cross section of the community. We create architecture that reduces barriers to use—whether physical, cultural or social.

## 5. Seize opportunities for social space

Informal social space is often overlooked in community facilities. We believe the provision of a variety of these spaces ensures that pools integrate with the lives of their users, and that linkages fostered there can benefit all while reducing operational problems. In planning aquatic complexes, we actively seek opportunities to provide such spaces, large and small, both within and between mandated program elements.

## 6. Innovate

Our work is animated by a spirit of innovation. We look for new solutions to the challenges that other designers accept as pre-determined--givens. Pushing boundaries sometimes involves greater risks which need to be managed with careful study, evaluation, testing and insight. The rewards of innovation are apparent in the unprecedented pools as community centres collected in this book.

## 7. Learn and evolve

We strive to learn from past projects, both our own and those of others. We learn from what has worked well and from what could be better. We travel and study culturally unique approaches to aquatic architecture from around the world, then seek opportunities to integrate them into our work. Learning is a crucial component of design and building.

## 8. Maintain focus on the community

Underlying our work is a belief in a dedicated responsibility to the communities we serve. This means providing facilities that go beyond merely meeting aquatic needs to, instead, define true community hubs, attractive to all. In doing this, we have been fortunate to work collaboratively with clients who share these goals and help them come to realization. We are grateful to these clients, plus the employees, consultants and most of all the public that have shared in shaping HCMA's aquatic architecture.

