



Urbanstrong team receives GRHC Award of Excellence for living wall

November 19, 2019 - Design / Build

Urbanstrong and team members EcoWalls and Parker Plants installed an award-winning 575 s/f living wall at IFF's R&D facility in New Jersey.

New York, NY Urbanstrong, in partnership with EcoWalls and Parker Plants, received the Green Roofs for Healthy Cities (GRHC) Award of Excellence in the Interior Living Wall category for the team's 24' wide by 24' high, eco-sustainable living wall installation in the lobby of IFF's facility.

Urbanstrong headed up sales, technology consulting, and project management; EcoWalls was the manufacturer and designer responsible for creating construction drawings and producing the project's planting design; Parker Plants installed the system and provides ongoing maintenance.

Shown (from left) are: Matthew Barmore, chair, GRHC; Alan Burchell, founder and principal, Urbanstrong; Tom Walsh, business development director, Parker Plants; Steven Peck, founder and president, GRHC, at the awards ceremony of GRHC's Grey to Green: D.C. Metro Region Conf.

The award was granted during a ceremony celebrating "the most outstanding green roofs, walls, and people in 2019" at GRHC's Grey to Green: D.C. Metro Region Conference held at the Tommy Douglas Conference Center.

Steven Peck, GRP, honorary ASLA, founder and president of GRHC, said, "This award-winning green wall project not only looks fantastic, but it was designed and conceived in a manner that improves its energy and water performance while providing pleasing scents for people working in the building."

The green wall is a welcome addition for the building's visitors and tenants on multiple levels. It

provides sound attenuation in a highly trafficked communal space. It is central to the lobby's biophilic design, one that offers people a link to the natural environment.

Urbanstrong founder and principal Alan Burchell said, "Providing people with an opportunity to connect with nature while in a hectic, business setting has proven to boost mental health and efficiency, offering a reprieve during a busy day."

The Process

After consulting with Urbanstrong to better understand which living wall technology best suited their needs, budget and design goals, the client ultimately selected a highly sustainable modular hydroponic planting panel system with an automatic, remotely monitored irrigation system.

Each of the living wall's 3-foot by 3-foot modular panels are 100% recyclable and made from recycled materials. The 9 s/f of flexible planting space doesn't restrict system designs to grid-like patterns. Further, plant roots are free to migrate throughout the entire volume of each modular panel allowing for the lush greenery to thrive indefinitely and virtually eliminates wilting and dying plants. The result is a near-zero plant turnover rate and, in fact, the primary maintenance feature will be occasional pruning.

A feature that sets this system apart from many other living walls on the market is the inorganic, lightweight growing media contained in each panel. Because it doesn't contain soil it will neither degrade nor attract pests or mold. This proprietary media was developed over several years by EcoWalls specifically for living walls. Its precise density creates a water holding capacity that allows for the optimum balance of water-to-oxygen. As this growing substrate locks in more moisture and nutrients, it drastically reduces the resources required to promote plant growth.

The irrigation system's web-enabled controls allow the manufacturer and local maintenance technicians to remotely monitor system operations, receive alerts, and adjust irrigation sequence/intervals to precisely deliver water and nutrients to the plants with high efficiency.

All living plants require a minimum amount of light to survive. A large skylight above the living wall provides plentiful ambient light for the plants and the rest of the lobby. An auxiliary, dedicated lighting system was installed to provide the remaining balance of the light levels needed by the plants on darker days or winter months.

The Urbanstrong team likes to call the system "the Tesla of living walls," said Burchell. "Its efficient use of resources makes it one of the most, possibly the most, sustainable living wall system on the market today."

The architect of the lobby renovation project was William McDonough + Partners. The Living Wall architect was Andrew Balto, AIA, Gannett Fleming Architects.

The Team

Urbanstrong is a full-service green building technology firm that designs, builds, and maintains a

range of green infrastructure solutions. Collectively, with its various partner companies and vendors, the team is responsible for hundreds of thousands of square feet of green roof, living wall and moss wall projects throughout the greater northeast over the past 12+ years.

EcoWalls, LLC is a living wall manufacturer and designer located in Milford, N.J. Through key partnerships and collaborations, EcoWalls works with design professionals interested in promoting green infrastructure.

Parker Plants provides interior plants and service, exterior plants and service, green wall, moss wall, and holiday decoration design, installation, and storage.

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Photo credit: Alan Burchell, Urbanstrong

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