

Net Result

Asked to design the Tennis Center at Randall's Island, Ricardo Zurita Architects aced it; advantage goes to the city By Linda G. Miller

The United States Professional Tennis Association lists 34 reasons why playing tennis is good for mental and physical fitness. "It's ironic," says Ricardo Zurita, AIA, "that many tennis centers, built to promote good health through exercise, are hermetically sealed, climate-controlled environments without any natural light or fresh air." So he prescribed the opposite tack in his design scheme for the Tennis Center at Randall's Island.

The \$16-million Tennis Center, operated by Sportime, opened in summer 2009 and is the city's largest tennis complex in more than 30 years. The 160,000-square-foot center features 20 courts (10 hard and 10 clay), stadium seating for 1,000 spectators (expandable to 2,500 with temporary bleachers), a clubhouse with a training and fitness center, lounge areas, a pro shop, a café/bar, classrooms, meeting facilities, and locker rooms with steam, sauna, and treatment areas. Five hard courts are permanently enclosed, with the rest designed to be housed in three air-supported structures during the indoor season.

Sheathed in muted blue metal panels with bright green accents, the pre-engineered steel structure contains the field house with five courts and a clubhouse in six equally-sized dedicated bays. The clubhouse bay is pivoted towards the entrance and away from the tennis court bays, creating a "fissure" within the structure that allows natural

light into the building. To reduce the power loads for heating and cooling, the building features a series of prominent louvers on the north and south façades, placed low on one side and high on the other, allowing for cross-ventilation via a chimney effect.

Creating a healthy environment was a primary concern of Zurita, but when the project began in 2006, a year before PlaNYC was released, budget constraints were more of an issue and he did not pursue LEED certification. "Nonetheless, I felt strongly that we could develop a green building within our budget," says Zurita. "Given the developments in green building design, I believe we would pursue certification if we were to do the project today."



ZURITA ARCHITECTS

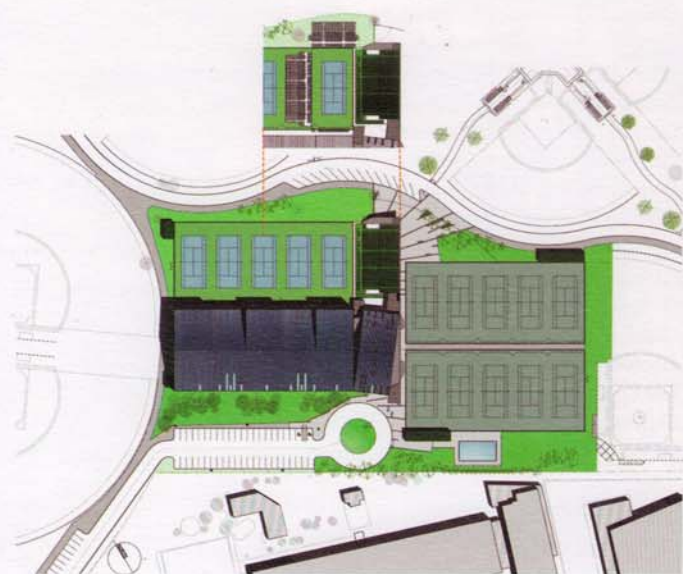
The Randall's Island Sports Foundation (RISF), founded in 1992 as a public-private partnership, works to realize the potential of the island, which is situated in the East River between East Harlem, the South Bronx, and Astoria, Queens. Ricardo Zurita Architects designed the master plan for the 480-acre park, re-envisioning it as a citywide destination for sports and recreation. In addition to the Tennis Center, the firm designed three comfort stations, an electrical substation, and, with the Hillier Group (now RMJM), the Icahn Stadium for track and field.

Working with three clients – private developer Sportime, the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation, and RISF – was challenging for Zurita, as each player was responsible to a different set of constituents with their own priorities. "Stress is unavoidable in any project this large," Zurita observes, "but since I play tennis, this project has provided me with a great outlet for frustration. And I've gotten a huge kick out of seeing some of the greatest tennis players in the world play at the center."

Linda G. Miller is a New York City-based freelance writer and a regular contributor to e-Oculus.

- Clients: Sportime TFM; Randall's Island Sport Foundation; NYC Department of Parks and Recreation
- Architect: Zurita Architects
- Architect-of-Record: Jerome Kerner/Bond Street Architecture & Design
- Contractor: ICA Sports & Building Systems
- Site Engineer: HDR
- Structural Engineer: Structural Consulting Services
- Mechanical/Electrical Engineer: Wesler-Cohen Associates
- Landscape Architect: MPFP LLC/M. Paul Friedberg & Partners

ZURITA ARCHITECTS



Above: Tennis Center at Randall's Island: Site plan with detail showing temporary bleachers for competition matches Above right: The cladding in muted blue metal panels with bright green accents keeps the size and bulk of the building from appearing overwhelming in the park setting