

Reference

Up to 30,000 visitors a day come to the Gathering Place and all ages play together on the various pieces of play equipment.

The Gathering Place in Tulsa, Oklahoma opened its gates on September 8 – the German playground equipment manufacturer Richter from Frasdorf, Bavaria is making an impact throughout this 27-hectare park located along the banks of the Arkansas River in the form of 350 pieces of playground equipment. The playground project is one of the largest in the U.S. and was developed in cooperation with the renowned landscape architecture firm Michael Van Valkenburgh (MVVA), which was responsible for the overall concept of the park.

“It was important to us and to MVVA to ensure inclusive use and full accessibility for everyone,” says Peter Heuken, project manager at Richter. Using this idea of inclusiveness as its guide, Richter practically translated the park theme of “Gathering” into playground equipment. “The focal point is independent, childlike play for young and old. They are all moving through the space without predisposition and without a specific destination and they experience moments of happiness and satisfaction that are both large and small,” adds Heuken. The playground offers an added level of challenge, risk as a positive factor, and a fantastic landscape. It gives Tulsa a new designed open space with enormous quality of experience along with a space that is being used enthusiastically.

“Tulsa is going to change play in public spaces in the U.S.,” says the project manager. Up to 30,000 people are already visiting the park every day. Visitors encounter a world of play that focuses less on extremes and more on inviting and intelligent opportunities for play and movement. This includes six towers connected by eight bridges. One of them spans a space of 18 meters at a height of six meters. Richter designed the 14-meters high Tulsa

Towers as well as a vertical water playground especially for the Gathering Place. Visitors will also find a sensory garden, a large water play area, a swing area, the Slide Valley, two high tunnel slides and a nine-meter-high wooden elephant. “Actually, the playground in Tulsa is an interactive Richter catalogue,” says Heuken. As part of this project, the company focused on natural materials to be used in equipment construction and also fought for natural materials for fall protection. Spaces for play and existing vegetation, including some large trees, merge into each other. The mountain larch wood for the equipment comes from sustainably managed forests in the Lungau region of Austria; the climbing structures are made of Hungarian Robinia wood. For sake of durability and stability, equipment was placed on steel feet, the towers have steel skeletons in part to be able to bear the enormous load of the suspension bridges, and of course to increase the service life.

“The playground equipment has to be very stable,” says Peter Heuken, “because teenagers and adults also play on the rocking ship in addition to small children.” Equipment must be able to be maintained and repaired readily in order to cope with the high loads resulting from play and to guarantee safety and function. Richter’s playground equipment was handmade in Frasdorf, Germany, and each piece is unique. A total of 38 shipping containers with playground equipment were shipped from Germany to Tulsa for the Gathering Place, then pre-assembled in Tulsa before being finally set up at the site.

www.richter-spielgeraete.de (in German). The exclusive distributor of Richter Spielgeräte in the United States is APE Studio: www.apeoriginal.com.

Gathering Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma, U.S., Play Area

