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Ways GuildWorks' Fabric Architecture Can Transform Your Space

BY COLLEEN DEHART

Turns out, fabric is good for a lot more in architecture than tents and umbrellas. It can replace other building materials as a permanent solution in many applications. “It is often misunderstood that fabrics might be something that are easily blown away or damaged when really they can be a long-term solution,” says **Mar Ricketts**, CEO and senior design principal at fabric architecture company **GuildWorks**.

GuildWorks has been producing, designing, and installing fabric structures for more than 20 years. During that time they have pushed the boundaries of what was once thought to be possible with tension fabric structures. “We are now building on a larger scale than ever before,” he says. The company has built inspiring structures for everyone from the likes of **Oracle** and **Nike** to hospitals and civic parks.

The benefits of fabric run the gamut—exceeding sustainability standards, managing stormwater, reducing urban heat island effect, and offering quick install times, design flexibility, durability, and low maintenance. “It’s really a combination of beauty and form with minimal materials,” Ricketts says.

The design flexibility of tension fabric structures allows for endless creative potential with few limitations. “It’s more than a structure. We are creating environments for people. We are creating a whole feel,” says **Sebastian Collet**, vice president and senior design principal. “It’s not just mere protection from elements but also a greater meaning behind what makes architecture special.”

Flip the page to read about seven of the ways fabric can transform a space.

GuildWorks' concepts use tension to span large spaces, creating outdoor ballrooms with layers of fabric-like low-level clouds that keep the public cool in summer. This installation has a free span of more than 500 feet by 350 feet.



1

Courtyard Covers/ Facades

COURTYARDS have been traditionally open to the elements. Using fabric to create spaces where people can easily get cover from sun, rain, and wind while still being in an outdoor environment allows for more use of outdoor space. "Outdoor living is becoming very important," Ricketts says. "Creating protected areas in that outdoor space will allow it to become more inhabitable."

3

OPEN-AIR STRUCTURES You'll find many of GuildWorks' permanent fabric structures in civic open-air spaces like parks and playgrounds. The structures add shade and weather protection without full coverage. "They are a great alternative to a gazebo, very lightweight, and add to the environment without adding mass. It's a nice, beautiful, functional space," Collet says.



2

Pavilions & Amphitheaters

As places of entertainment, pavilions and amphitheaters are a great space to incorporate **FABRIC ARCHITECTURE**. The design flexibility of fabric allows for strategic light reflection while providing a visually stimulating atmosphere. Less structural support is needed for the lightweight fabric than other materials, helping to keep the area open.

"It really has a beautiful presence for the audience," Collet says.

PHOTO: COURTESY OF GUILDWORKS

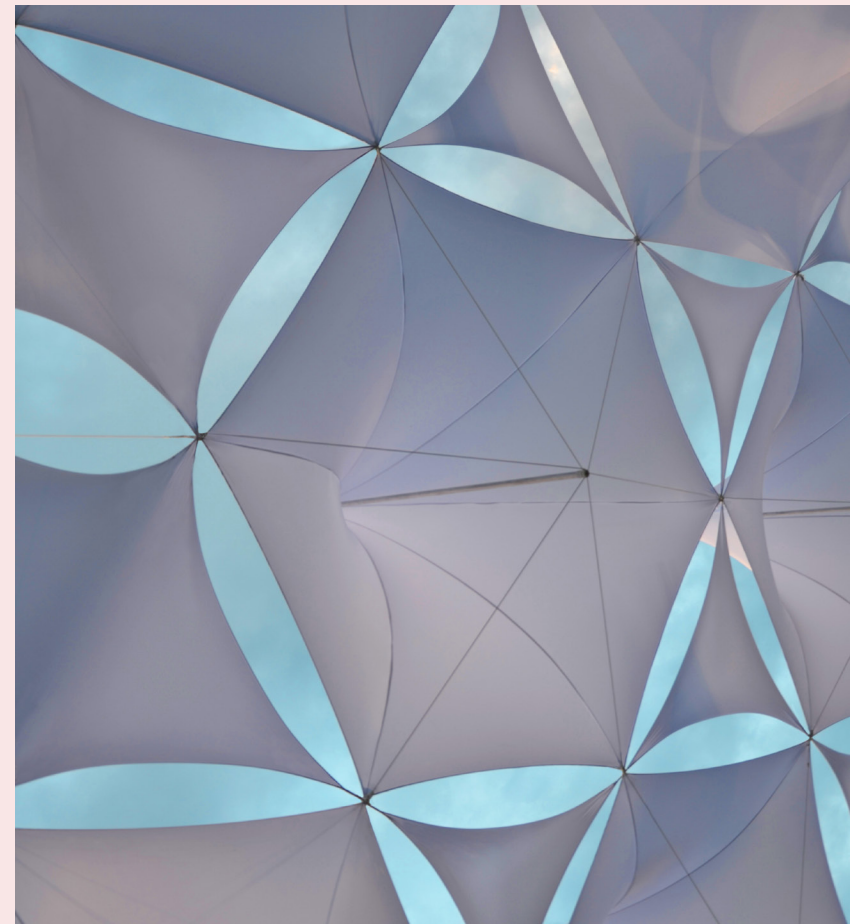
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Alternative to Glass While technically not fabric, GuildWorks also uses a technology called ETFE, or ethylene tetrafluoroethylene, which is a translucent polymer sheeting. The lightweight sheets provide a less expensive alternative to glass walls or skylights. ETFE meets the same R-values as glass at 10 to 13% of the weight and spans further increasing open space by requiring less structural elements to hold it in place.

5

Sound Dampening

Using fabric architecture inside can add design value while softening an environment. It can be used to break up space while also dampening sound. The solar reflectiveness of fabric panels can also help to bounce light around a space, adding to the atmosphere. "There are lots of fun things that can happen with interior spaces and fabrics," Ricketts says.



6

BUILDING ENCLOSURES Adding fabric to walkways between buildings transforms spaces into beautiful works of art that double as meeting places or retail venues. The fabric provides protection from the elements, too, allowing for increased use of the space. "Maybe you find that rain is hurting business at a mall or other retail venue," Ricketts says. "A fabric enclosure can protect the environment from rain or other weather while still making it feel like a natural outdoor space."

PHOTO: COURTESY OF GUILDWORKS

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More Unique Uses

Utilizing fabric for the roof of a parking structure, stadium, or transport hub can help to reduce the heat island effect of those structures while creating a beautiful urban centerpiece. "Fabric will keep it cool while adding artistic style. It makes it a more beautiful element instead of a concrete box," Ricketts says. The tension fabric can also be positioned to direct stormwater runoff to a cistern or other vessel, where it can be stored and reused.