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Expanding the Exterior Footprint with Mid-Door Spaces and Beyond: Breathing Life, Biophilia and Wellbeing into Modern Outdoor Spaces

Cambridge, MD – Architects are often seeking for ways to create or enhance outdoor spaces in commercial buildings. But in this unprecedented year, all eyes have turned to examining whether a business has the physical space to take it outside. And if not, how can adjacent exterior spaces be adapted for this new design objective? A new charge for architects in 2021 will be expanding the footprint of usable space to the outdoors, a trend with potential to impact all building types and markets.

“Now more than ever, public spaces are poised to become the grand lobbies and public waiting rooms of our neighborhoods and cities,” says Michael Wagner in [Gensler’s blog](#). “At a time when crowds will be metered and access controlled like never before, public space is where people will spend a lot of time, waiting and doing all the things people do when they’re idle,” wagers Wagner.

Buildings with atriums, overhangs and semi-enclosed spaces provide enhanced access to these extended outdoor spaces. These “mid-door” spaces – a term coined by Transsolar’s Erik Olsen in his series [What is Indoors?](#) for *Fast Company* – also provide biophilic benefits fundamental to human performance while delivering a flexible program rife with daylight, ventilation and naturally filtered and humidified air.

On the coattails of companies like Amazon, many workplaces are adopting this approach to their facilities. For example, C3, a [Gensler spec project](#) in Los Angeles, transforms the border between an office building and a parking structure into a curated series of outdoor spaces. In environments like this, where building materials must maintain a high level of both performance and aesthetic, metal fabric is an ideal material for expanding the exterior footprint of existing buildings. In addition to its modern look and customization options, metal fabric brings performance characteristics such as daylighting ability and providing natural ventilation, safety and security.

Airport design is also evolving to make the passenger journey more of a semi-permeable experience, says Wagner, pointing to JFK’s JetBlue Terminal 5, which weaves a new outdoor dining roof terrace into the design. In this case, metal mesh may be designed to include railings, balustrades and gabions for rooftop lounges or restaurant terrace spaces without obstructing views.

In addition to fall protection, metal mesh can secure a semi-permanent perimeter for after hours. GKD’s collaboration with CornellCookson resulted in a sleek security product called SteelWeave. This metal mesh grill combines GKD fabric with CornellCookson roller shutter technology for elegant theft protection in retail, restaurant and hospitality settings.

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With current health and safety precautions encouraging socially distanced, outdoor activities, architects are exploring sunshades, overhangs, and other ceiling structures to hover above and define an exterior space. Metal mesh provides a flexible design solution that can adapt to the design of outdoor spaces depending on factors such as location, exposure to sun, moisture and other elements. However, architects do not have compromise on aesthetics, as there are multiple customization options using a wide variety of finishes, weaves and metal alloys.

Lastly, and perhaps most convincingly for developers and urban planners, there is a sound business case for developing and providing outdoor amenities—at least in a corporate setting. “Research has shown that in the corporate setting being outdoors is the least expensive place to invest in per square foot—it doesn’t cost a lot compared to the building,” says Kirt Martin, vice president of marketing and design for Landscape Forms, the authority on creating outdoor spaces. “Those spaces tend to be overlooked but are really critical to the human experience and to people.”

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About GKD Metal Fabrics

As the leading provider of woven metal fabric for architectural solutions, GKD Metal Fabrics offers architects the ability to create dynamic, modern environments that address numerous building challenges. Drawing on more than 95 years of German engineering excellence and precise American manufacturing, GKD revolutionized the category of metal fabric applications. With thousands of interior and exterior installations constructed worldwide, architects and specifiers recognize GKD as the metal fabric authority. Headquartered in Germany, GKD has five other facilities in the US, South Africa, China, India and Chile – as well as branches in France, Spain, Dubai and worldwide representatives.

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