

San Diego landscape architecture firm opens first office outside California in Denver



An example of the group's work at a San Diego master-planned community.
DEVON BOUTTE, SCHMIDT DESIGN GROUP



By [Catie Cheshire](#) – Reporter, Denver Business Journal
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Story Highlights

- Schmidt Design Group opened its first office outside California in Denver's River North Art District.
- Todd Schechinger, who started his career in Denver 20 years ago, leads the new office.
- The firm specializes in sustainable landscape design for parks, campuses, and community spaces.

A San Diego company is planting new roots in Denver.

Landscape architecture firm Schmidt Design Group just opened its first location outside of California in the [River North Art District](#) of Denver. The company has expanded to work on projects beyond California in recent years and sees Denver as the ideal place to launch a stronger presence in the Mountain West, according to President and Managing Partner JT Barr.

"Denver reflects the kind of culture and environment that we are passionate about as a firm," Barr said. "It has a thriving urban core, but it also is a community that really has a passion for the natural world, that embraces the city and the duality of that."

Todd Schechinger, principal at Schmidt Design Group, leads the new Denver office. He started his career in the city 20 years ago with now-shuttered landscape firm EDAW.

The company wanted to open a Denver office to serve existing and future clients in the region, Barr said.

Schmidt Design Group was founded in 1983, employing an environmental stewardship mindset.

"Sustainability wasn't a word in 1983, but that was core to who we were as a practice, even at our founding, and it has been and continued to be integral to who we are as a practice," Barr said. "We evaluate every single project through the lens of resiliency, of long-term operational needs, of carbon footprint and sequestration, of maximizing the sustainable contribution of a project to the community."

Denver is currently experiencing a drought due to low snowpack in an unusually warm winter. Denver Water, the city's water utility, is implementing [mandatory outdoor water restrictions](#) and water-use surcharges. The utility promotes "Coloradoscaping", an alternative word to xeriscaping, a landscaping philosophy that decreases the need for irrigation by using plants suited to the semi-arid climate.

Schmidt Design Group will fit right in to that philosophy, Barr said, emphasizing the firm's commitment to listening to the community and the land itself.

He cites the group's work on Civita Park in San Diego's Mission Valley neighborhood as an example. Schmidt Design Group created outdoor amenities and landscaping for the 230-acre master-planned community, implementing relics discovered during the build from the site's history as a former sand and gravel quarry.

The firm is known for designing outdoor spaces, community parks and civic spaces, commercial campuses, multifamily housing developments, healthcare and educational campuses, Schmidt Design Group said.

Barr highlights the firm's work on River Park for San Diego State University, which transformed what was the largest asphalt parking lot west of the Mississippi into over 60 acres of open space.

"That creates incredible recreational value, but also has grounded resilience integrated as far as management of storm water and of flood waters, given that it's directly adjacent to the San Diego River," Barr said. "Those are the types of projects that really are engaging for us, is how we can solve multiple challenges within the sphere of a project through the crafting of our designs and our creative process?"



The firm decided to locate at 3513 Brighton Blvd. in RiNo because the district has both creative and industrial roots that Schmidt Design Group can pull inspiration from, Schechinger said.

"I absolutely loved starting my career in Denver back in 2006. This place really resonated with me on a deep level," he said. "It's absolutely incredible to have the opportunity to return to a place that I feel so passionately about. Colorado communities, they have a similar level of passion for the spaces that they have in parks, streets, plazas and campuses. Landscape architects, we really play a critical role in shaping how people experience everyday life, and that's what really excites us about being here and being back here."

The office currently holds just Schechinger and one other employee, but the hope is that as Schmidt builds trust and relationships growth will follow. Schechinger is already part of the local American Institute of Architects Regional Design & Urban Knowledge Committee and the [Urban Land Institute's](#) Urban Places Committee.