



'Confluence' underpass artwork is colorful addition to Sacramento's River District



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Automobile traffic still roars by on Interstate 5 above, but the hues of lighting on Richards Boulevard beneath it now offer a more relaxed feel, especially at night.

Max Ehrenfreund

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A sculpture made of concrete and light is part of the rebuilt Richards Boulevard underpass at Interstate 5.

Shifting blues, greens and purples fall from LEDs overhead onto the waved concrete walls of the underpass, representing the Sacramento and American rivers, which converge 1,500 feet away.

"I've had numerous families come through and say how beautiful it is. What a nice change," said Ray Gallo Jr., who owns and operates a McDonald's restaurant at the interchange.

The 112-foot installation, called "Confluence," was dedicated in June. It's the brainchild of city architect Greg Taylor and electrical engineer Sompol Chatusripitak, and it's the newest of the city's many artistic tributes to its rivers.

"When you see it at night, the sculpture almost comes to life," Chatusripitak said. "The light from the color LED gives you the illusion that the waves are actually moving."

Chatusripitak used state-of-the-art, four-color LEDs, capable of producing almost any color, which his team programmed using manipulated video of a river.

"It was a hard project. It was really very difficult, both in terms of the hardware and the software," Chatusripitak said. "But at the end, the product is really worth the effort."

Public artwork "helps define a place," said Shelly Willis, director of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission's Art in Public Places program. She was not involved in the "Confluence" project.



"We've all been to those intersections where there is ... an AM/PM, and a Target, where you could be anywhere," she said. "We're drawn to neighborhoods and parts of the city that are distinct and unusual."

"Confluence" is "a gateway to the River District and to the central city," said Rachel Hazlewood, a project director in the city Economic Development Department. She added that the sculpture makes a statement to visitors exiting the interstate about the community's goals for development in the neighborhood.

"It sends the right message that this district is cared for," she said.

Planners and officials have an ambitious vision for the River District over the next few decades, and the art construction at the underpass is one of several recent development projects in the area.

The California Highway Patrol headquarters on North Seventh Street is a historic building renovated in 2009. The California Lottery's new building and the Greyhound bus terminal were completed last summer.

"We've been out there since 1996," said Gallo, the McDonald's operator.

"Richards Boulevard? In the past, it's been a rough area. Over the last three to five years, with all the work that's been done, there's been a lot of progress."



At the 65-acre Township 9 site, developers plan to build 2,500 housing units as well as retail spaces, and service to a light-rail station there began last month.

The city's long-term vision for the district includes a lively entertainment district along the Sacramento River, with heavy pedestrian traffic through the underpass.

One of the aims of the \$10 million reconstruction project was to make the underpass more accessible to bicyclists and pedestrians. The city and Caltrans added bike lanes and widened sidewalks.

The lights in "Confluence" are not only colorful but also bright, and the sculpture is intended to make the experience of walking under the freeway safe and pleasant.

"These freeway entrances, we need to overcome them as best we can as barriers to pedestrians," said Taylor, the architect. He added that the project could "mend the seam" in the River District created by the highway.

The sculpture he designed is "setting the stage for future development, absolutely," said Patty Kleinknecht, executive director of the River District, a business association.

"We're just really excited," she said. "We think they came up with something really great."

The lights are on constantly now as city engineers break in the new components, Chatusripitak said, but if you want to see "Confluence," go in the evening, when the light show is at its most dramatic.

Public Art That Pays Homage to Sacramento's Rivers

- **"Active Ecosystem (SMF)"**

by Camille Utterback
Medium: Animation generated by custom software, displayed on an elevator shaft
Where: Sacramento International Airport, Terminal B

- **"Flying Carpet"**

by Seyed Alavi
Medium: Digital image of a river printed on a pedestrian-bridge carpet
Where: Sacramento International Airport, Terminal A

- **"River's Edge"**

by Gregory Kondos
Medium: Etched and colored glass
Where: Sacramento International Airport, Terminal A

- **"Alhambra Reservoir Project"**

by Michael Bishop
Medium: LEDs, aluminum and steel
Where: 3230 J St.

- **"River Dance"**

by Lauren Cogburn
Medium: Oil on canvas
Where: Water and Sewer Administration Building, 35th Avenue and South Land Park Drive



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Vehicles pass beneath I-5, above and below. The owner of a nearby business says the "Confluence" project is an example of the work that has improved the area known as the River District. Other projects are on the drawing board.

• **"Convergence"**

by Brad Goldberg

Medium: Terrazzo floor

Where: Esquire Plaza, 1215 K St.



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