

Questions and Answers

1. Why was the art on the walls designed the way it was?

The subject matter on the sound barriers and retaining walls of T-REX is not intended to be viewed as static art shown in a gallery, but as “visual mitigation” for the roadway as one travels. It is intended to bring a special quality texture to barren concrete walls.

2. Why were the retaining walls designed with one pattern and the sound walls with another?

Sizes and shapes of different images were adjusted to fit different types of walls. For instance, the buffalo was too large to fit on a panel wall at 10 feet wide, but the swallows fit nicely. The Mechanically Stabilized Earth (MSE) walls allowed designers to repeat patterns of smaller images.

3. Why are there swallow tail feathers on some panels without swallow bodies?

Separating the swallow’s tail from the body provided more versatility in layout sequencing. Detached from the body, the tail becomes an element of the background texture.

4. Why do patterns appear to match or line up on some panels and not on others?

Pattern alignment is based on structural and artistic consideration. The artists intended to depict a varied sequence. For example, the Front Range is always changing; its appearance is continually affected by light and shadow, weather conditions and time of day. The mountain map pattern is made of 5 foot by 10 foot panels that become puzzle pieces to create different arrangements. The mountain map will vary in appearance, from impressionistic to a more defined series of mountain peaks, suggesting the changes we see along the Front Range. (This image was designed to maximize the effect of the mountains as the contours change.)

5. Will the concrete walls be painted?

Wall panels containing only the art subjects will be painted with a concrete gray stain, producing a smooth satin finish. In addition, the stain being used on these walls can be reapplied for graffiti removal, minimizing the cost and time of maintaining the walls.

The walls south of Quincy Avenue and throughout the Denver Tech Center will be painted a sandy/tan color to match color schemes existing in the area.

6. What is going to happen to the wooden fences?

Many of the wooden fences on public property are either damaged or extremely old. Because it is expensive to maintain those fences, all wooden fences are being removed and replaced with either a concrete sound wall or a 6-foot high chain link fence.

7. Why is art only on walls facing public roadways and not on the side facing residences?

Designs were only incorporated to be seen by the traveling public. Because individual preferences differ greatly, choosing a design to face private property would have been difficult, if not impossible.

There are many types of walls incorporated into a large construction project such as T-REX. Each of these types of walls has its own restrictions and rules governing how texture can be applied. Before forming the panels, each layout is checked by several project staff to ensure it conforms to design-build standards and once approved, all layouts are sent to the manufacturer. Each panel and MSE block are labeled with a number and placed according to plan.

Swallow pattern wall



Wall Art on the T-REX Project

THE WALL ART OF T-REX

HISTORY

Early in the development of the Transportation Expansion (T-REX) project, an urban design team comprised of landscape architects, engineers and experienced, local, wall art designers began meeting with neighborhoods, entities and municipalities. The team was seeking input on the proposed concepts for what the corridor would look like when the project was complete. These meetings were hosted in neighborhoods directly affected by the highway and light rail expansion. Neighborhood representatives, community leaders and government officials attended the meetings.

Through these community meetings, it was determined that integrating surface design into the highway infrastructure was an important goal. North of I-225, many of the wall systems have bas-relief or raised patterns, textures and imagery that enhance the surface of the concrete. The selected patterns have a regional focus, which offer travelers a special view of nature and history relating to the metro Denver area. Art walls in this area will be painted gray.

South of I-225, within the Denver Tech Center, there is a distinct change in character. The walls are more contemporary, technology-oriented and about office and commercial land uses. These walls will be painted tan.

Original Concept

In looking at historic maps of Denver and the icons in the maps, the artists visualized how the plains border the city on three sides with the mountains rising above the city to the west. Their goals were to depict Denver's history and what has occurred along this route historically, geographically and ecologically. The textures have several layers of visual information for the purpose of supporting different levels of viewing interest. It is the hope of the artists that travelers will continue to discover new details and pattern arrangements each time they use the I-25 corridor.

Buffalo Pattern

Historically, gentlemen farmers established orchards from Hampden Ave. south on I-25 and built weekend, vacation homes. Buffalos roamed these open plains, grazing on native vegetation. Additionally, this part of the highway is above grade, providing travelers with vast mountain views. Locating the buffalo and mountain map patterns along this stretch of I-25 will call to mind thoughts of the great open space, contrasting the sensation of confining space travelers may feel in the Narrows. Because this image has a strong visual presence, the buffalo pattern will be a landmark for travelers entering or leaving the Denver metro area.

Mountains Map Pattern

The Rocky Mountains are the dominant focal point looking from the plains westward across Denver. Denver neighborhood maps were incorporated into the wall art to give texture and body to the mountain pattern.

Looking at the mountains, we see a layering of ranges rather than a flat silhouette. The mountain map pattern echoes the feeling of depth one may get from looking at the mountains and the continual change to the contours of mountain peaks as they are affected by weather and light throughout the day.

Buffalo with mountain map pattern wall



Farm Fields Pattern

Farmers settled in the plains southeast of Denver, planting crops and orchards. Although many of these farmlands have disappeared as Denver has expanded, farming remains a significant part of Denver's history and of Colorado's present. The farm fields are represented by an aerial view, similar to what one sees when flying into Denver.

Cottonwood Pattern

There are stars in the cottonwoods. If you grasp a cottonwood twig, neither too green nor too rotten, and snap it at a wrinkled growth node, a perfect five-pointed star may be revealed on the broken ends.

Cottonwood trees grow near water in this arid climate and therefore settlers set up shelter under these trees. Currently in Denver, cottonwood trees line the Highline Canal, which winds through the city and I-25, providing a recreational greenbelt.

Tipi (Teepee) Pattern

Denver sits in a shallow descending slope, a mile high on its floor, rising gently on its sides into plateaus, foothills and mountains. The confluence of the Platte River and Cherry Creek created a natural campsite for Native American plainspeople.

In honor of this heritage, the tipi pattern was created, based on a composite of Native American dwellings.

Swallow Pattern

Swallows are migratory, urban birds often seen coasting and dipping on short, warm updrafts.

They are likely to be seen from our cars in any city neighborhood. On the art panels, they dart gracefully across a landscape built of Denver maps.

Magpie Pattern

Magpies, scavengers of the city and the plains, fly through the native grasses of Colorado. Although raucous and sometimes aggressive, magpies are beneficent creatures in the grassland's ecosystem. Historically, they followed the buffalo, cleaning their hides and gleaning insects.

Grass Pattern

Within the grass pattern are native Colorado grasses including blue grama, the Colorado state grass that is native to both sides of the Continental Divide.

William Morris, a leading designer in the Arts and Crafts school, influences the pattern. The Arts and Crafts style is a dominant, architectural style in the part of Denver where the grass pattern is located.

Summary

In summary, the art seen on the sound walls and retaining walls of the T-REX Project is intended to remind us of our environmental, historical and cultural roots as Denver defines a new century.

Tipi pattern wall

