

Arlington, WA, Skatepark

The Result of a Successful Blend of Artistry and Shotcrete Know-How

by Chris Hildebrand



Construction of fullpipe



Shooting the fullpipe



Finishing the fullpipe



Looking into the 16 ft (4.9 m) fullpipe

The most successful skatepark projects are the result of a combination of disparate skills. Modern skatepark construction requires a blend of shotcrete savvy, artistic daring, and a skateboarder's eye for spotting necessary last-minute design tweaks in the field.

The Arlington Skatepark is an example of a modern world-class skatepark. The success of this project can be attributed to the fact that it was built by shotcrete specialists; was based on a progressive, cutting-edge design; and was built by skateboarders who massaged the design with multiple revisions as construction progressed.

Grindline Skateparks, Inc., a design/build contractor specializing in concrete skateparks, from Seattle, WA, was hired in early 2004 by the City of Arlington, WA, to develop construction drawings and specifications for its skatepark project. The challenge was to develop a world-class destination-type skatepark that would appeal to all skill levels, from beginner to professional; include both "pool" and "streetstyle" design elements; and yet fit within the City's \$280,000 budget. Mark "Monk" Hubbard, Grindline president and lead designer, took on the challenge himself. Hubbard wanted a showcase park that would incorporate all the unique design elements that his company had been developing over the past decade; but he also had an ulterior motive: he wanted a place



Overview of skatepark

where he could go skating himself. Arlington is just an hour north of Seattle, and Hubbard knew this would be one of the few chances he would get to develop his own skateboard paradise. Hubbard, like all 25 of his employees, is an avid skateboarder. He began skateboarding in the late 1970s and was introduced to construction by building halfpipes in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, Hubbard was building shotcrete swimming pools and began dabbling with do-it-yourself shotcrete skate bowl construction. By the end of the decade, he had established a reputation for himself as one of the best skatepark design/builders in the world, and with his 10 years of shotcrete experience, he was able to build any skate structure his imagination could come up with.

Hubbard's final design for the Arlington Skatepark featured a 4000 ft² (372 m²) urban "street plaza" area with a 6000 ft² (557 m²) bowl area. The bowl area, which loosely resembles an empty swimming pool, included 10 ft (3 m) deep walls and a 16 ft (4.9 m) diameter fullpipe with a capsuled end (the first of its kind to be built on the west coast). When the plans were complete, the project went out to public bid and Grindline was awarded the project.

Ground was broken on October 7, 2004. A dry well had to be built to manage the large amount of stormwater that would occasionally flow through the bowl's floor drains. Winter in the northwest is not without its rain, and earthwork was frequently interrupted due to oversaturation of the clayey soil. All decent skateparks are designed by skateboarders, but it is an added benefit if the builder who actually constructs the skatepark is a skater too. Rob Owen is one of the core founding members of the Grindline company. He has been

skateboarding for over 25 years and building skateparks for half that time. On top of being the construction foreman for the Arlington Skatepark, Owen oversaw hundreds of in-the-field design revisions on the project. A contractor's ability to make and execute last-minute, on-the-fly design decisions is often what separates the truly world-class skateparks from the merely good ones. Owen's ability to determine when a bowl needed to be deeper or a wall needed to be steeper was tested daily on this project. Because the design was so experimental and unique, actual construction of the elements was sequenced so that the design could be developed as construction progressed along. The largest and most difficult part of the project was construction of the central "fullpipe" feature. This 16 ft (4.9 m) diameter, 30 ft (9.1 m) long pipe was constructed with shotcrete against a meticulously constructed wooden form clad with tempered hardboard. Requiring even greater shotcrete skill was the construction of the capsuled end of the fullpipe. Known as a cradle, this skatepark feature looks like a cereal bowl on its side. When shooting a cradle, the nozzleman has to place a great quantity of wet-mix shotcrete directly above his head—blasting shotcrete upside down and then steel-trowel finishing the surface to a smooth surface. In addition to a sleek finish and a good design, skateparks require extremely high tolerances in regards to their geometries. Radii of curves in particular need to be as consistent and smooth as possible throughout the park, and yet every wall needs to be slightly different to achieve proper drainage.

Owen and his crew persevered through the weather and numerous design challenges to complete the project on January 20, 2005. Within



Looking into the 10 ft (3 m) deep end



Street plaza area

weeks of its completion, the Arlington Skatepark was featured in various skateboard magazines around the globe and was being enthusiastically celebrated as one of the country's most noteworthy destination skateparks. A contest series held its final competition in the park a few months later and all participants agreed that it was one of the best skateparks they had ever ridden.

The true geometry of shape, glass-like surface, and progressive design characteristics makes the Arlington Skatepark a world-class destination that has already attracted skateboarders from all over the country. The success of this skatepark is testament to the importance of using specialized shotcrete contractors when attempting to build a high-quality skatepark.



Chris Hildebrand is the general manager and co-owner of Grindline Skateparks, Inc., Seattle, WA. He oversees company sales and operations for skatepark design and construction projects all over the country. For more information on Grindline and to view photos from its 50+ skatepark portfolio, visit www.grindline.com.