

# Q2 STADIUM MAKES HISTORY IN AUSTIN

**Q2 Stadium is the first stadium to be built for a professional sports team in Austin, Texas.**

**Q2 Stadium**, the new home of **Major League Soccer's Austin FC**, opened its doors in June when the U.S. Women's National Team took on Nigeria. The club kicked off its first home game against the **San Jose Earthquakes** on June 19 in front of a full-capacity crowd. Developer **Two Oak Ventures** worked with Austin FC's ownership group, programme manager **CAA ICON**, architect **Gensler** and construction manager Austin Commercial to bring the fast-paced project to fruition. Jonathan Emmett, Principal and Design Director, Gensler, told PS&AM: "This is a project that's been about four years in the making in terms of the design and construction. One of the most critical points to make is that this is an expansion team within the MLS. It's the first professional sports team in Austin, so we're building the first professional venue for the first professional team in a very fast-growing city. As a designer that's a unique situation."





“We looked at about seven or eight different sites around the city, then after selection we then went through an almost two-year design process before breaking ground in September 2019.” The stadium is sited on a 24-acre plot to the north of downtown Austin, near the Domain, at McKalla Place, and has a seating capacity of 20,500. It has a natural grass playing surface and its unique design includes a signature canopy roof structure, which offers shade and coverage from inclement weather, as well as providing an unequalled event atmosphere. The design also includes future expansion capacity to construct a new seating deck affixed to the North Building, which would add approximately 1,500 new seats to both the soccer and concert seating configurations. Emmett said: “The capacity was felt to be very appropriate for the market size. We do have the ability to expand and add another 1,500 seats in the



VENUE IN  
FOCUS  
Q2 STADIUM



future. We've created a diversity of opportunities and a really great variety in terms of seating types to appeal to a very wide audience within the Austin market.

“The supporters' section which is in the South end of the stadium is 4,000 strong with standing room only. That is seen as the focal point in terms of the game day experience.

“We've also got a very diverse arrangement of hospitality spaces and premium spaces within the building. One thing that was critical was to create a wide range of product and make it feel very integrated and very cohesive as well. It was important not to have a venue that feels like there are the haves and the have nots, where the premium spaces are very segregated.

“We've got three club spaces of varying sizes distributed around the building including a Field Club which is the most exclusive space with 380 seats looking directly onto the West sideline. There are 27 suites on a private level as well as more intimate four or six-seater loge boxes. The hospitality spaces are really seen as more social gathering spaces, which was critical in terms of being in a new market, appealing to a broader audience and bringing people in to experience the game who may be less familiar with soccer, and who are looking at this as a new social experience.”

The stadium boasts four climate-controlled bars/club lounges for Austin FC matches and other special events (including community meetings); Public

DAS and WiFi systems throughout to boost connectivity and offer access to stadium technology features; a large LED videoboard and interactive ribbon panel technology to further boost the fan experience; the most advanced stadium lighting capabilities in the world as Q2 Stadium is the first to install 100% of the field lighting system with tunable RGB LED lights; and the Verde Store, the Austin FC retail space which is open on matchdays and non-matchdays.

## CLIMATE CONTROL

Q2 Stadium is oriented on site in such a way that natural breezes blow through the venue. It also boasts the second largest roof in an MLS stadium.

Emmett said: “When the MLS looked at coming to Austin, one of their biggest concerns was climate and the struggles in Dallas and Houston with the venues there, just in terms of playing through the hot summer. They wanted to ensure that there was an appropriate strategy here to deal with the Texas climate.”

As well as extending over the front row of seats to provide shade and protection from rain, the roof helps to create an intimate atmosphere.

He added: “It was really about designing a roof that would create intimacy for the venue. From day one the ownership and the club really wanted to create an intimate environment and a little bit of homefield advantage, something that felt intimidating and loud, a roof canopy that would reflect the noise and that would be recognisable for people driving by and on TV.”

» Structural engineering was carried out by **Walter P Moore**. Principal Mark Waggoner told PS&AM: “One of the biggest things about this particular job was that from design to completing construction it was one of the fastest jobs we’ve ever done.

“One of the big drivers on the schedule and the reason we had to be done by August last year, was to get the grass growing. The assembly of the roof and everything had to be done using cranes on the field. We had to clear those out of the way so they could get the grass seeded and established in the fall before the growing season kicked in the spring.” Jeff Nixon, principal Walter P Moore, said that the stadium construction was essentially four different buildings that were all integrated to support the roof. “It was a tight budget, so we had to really find some unique ways to support the largest roof in MLS,” he said.

The roof is a cable supported structure and complies to FIFA standards where every seat is covered from the drip line. It is supported by four 110ft tall super columns.

Waggoner added: “One of the big challenges we have on MLS jobs is that the revenue model means that the stadium has to be quite budget conscious. There are a lot of things that we have to do to try to keep the costs under control. We were able to build a lot of the lower seating bowl on grade, which is very inexpensive construction.”

The cable-structure of the roof also meant less steel was used in construction, helping to lower costs. Waggoner said Walter P Moore helped create a connected BIM model that was handed off to fabricator Irwin Steel in order to support the steel fabrication schedule.

Nixon added: “That process really saved months because there’s usually a

handover and they have to go and build it, but it was also very collaborative. Austin Commercial the contractor got on board with this very early in the process.

“One of the stories I would say about this whole project was the collaboration between the contractor, Gensler and us. Hand in hand, everyone knew what was going on, from the roof to the foundations to architecture. That was one of the really big things that made this project successful.”

Waggoner added: “The roof makes all the difference in terms of the shade that you get and some of the breezes that are created in terms of keeping you comfortable and wanting to be in the stands. The stadium is pretty open at the corners of the building and the back of the bowl so there’s a pathway for breezes to flow in and around the stadium.”

Emmett said: “We designed an open corner concept which allows for cooling breezes to flow through the venue. That’s not only great for the fans, it’s great for the players and it’s also great for the grass health as well.”

Also, for fan comfort, approximately 30% of Q2 Stadium seats (6,000 seats) feature breathable mesh seating technology, which represents a commitment to guest comfort in addition to holding the distinction as the largest volume of breathable mesh seats installed in a major league venue in the world.

## COMMUNITY FOCUS

Q2 Stadium is aiming to be LEED Silver certified for sustainability. It offers eight acres of open and green space, including public accessibility trails and a performance and gathering area adjacent to Q2 Stadium.

Emmett said: “Sustainability and the

environment are very important to the population of Austin. It’s a very outdoor focused city with a lot of parks and outdoor spaces. Recreation plays a big part of the culture, so it was important to ensure sustainable design.”

The club was also very keen to ensure that the site was accessible and usable by the local population in the community day in day out.

“The site has been designed with a series of open green spaces and parks that invite the community in, whether people are going for a jog, a bike ride or picnic in the park.

“There’s an area where we can host farmers markets, art shows, movies in the park and these kinds of events. It’s very much about inviting the community to engage with the team.

Austin prides itself on being known as the live music capital of the world and the stadium is also looking to take advantage of this market.

Emmett added: “Even though this is very much a soccer specific venue, we were charged with the notion that this had to be an absolute world class concert venue as well, not only in terms of the fan experience but how you design a venue that can allow for very easy load in load out for a production team to come in set up a concert.

“This was absolutely critical in terms of the economics of the project. The entire south end, where we have the supporters’ section, is demountable. About 3,000 seats can be removed to reveal a permanent stage set up with a rigging grid installed directly over it for very easy access for setting up and installing a large stadium touring show with direct access from the loading dock with 60 truck bays and direct access to the stage. This will be one of the premier concert venues not only in the city but within the state.” ■



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