

# Interstitial Installation | Site Specific Furniture as an Architectural Microcosm

**Christopher D. Trumble**  
University of Arizona

The English word furniture is derived from the French word *fourniture(s)*, which means “supplies”. The word furniture shares its root with furnishing, defined as “fitting out or equipping” and being furnished as the “condition of being equipped whether in body or mind.” One can then consider furniture to be, that which equips the mind or body, presumably in preparation for or accommodation of a particular activity. Furniture, like architecture, facilitates a physical and psychological experience through equipping the mind and body of its users, therefore rendering furniture a microcosm of architecture. As a microcosm, furniture design and fabrication offer unique opportunities for architecture students; providing the ability to experience a comprehensive design process that begins with conceptualization and concludes with the realization of an actual product that can be evaluated for physical integrity, use and aesthetics. Furniture design is an opportunity to supplant the speculative nature of traditionally hypothetical academic design exercises with one that is verifiable.

The Interstitial Installation project challenged undergraduate students at the School of Architecture at the XXXXXXXX XX XXXXXX to design and build an installation to revitalize the interstitial space between the old and new buildings that comprise the college facilities. The existing space was fertile with programmatic and aesthetic potential but was under utilized and uninspiring. The studio was given \$6000, seven weeks and the use of the school’s material laboratory.

The pedagogy employed in this project empowers students to negotiate project-based experiences that are analogous to professional practice, challenging students to engage in anthropological and evidenced-based pre-design research, and work collaboratively to develop designs in response to real world conditions and constraints. Students subsequently develop budgets, schedules, construction and shop drawings, proceeding with fabrication and installation. The project is not merely the opportunity for students to build, but to assume ownership and transform the ideal into reality, where the only acceptable outcome is for the poetic and the pragmatic to become one.

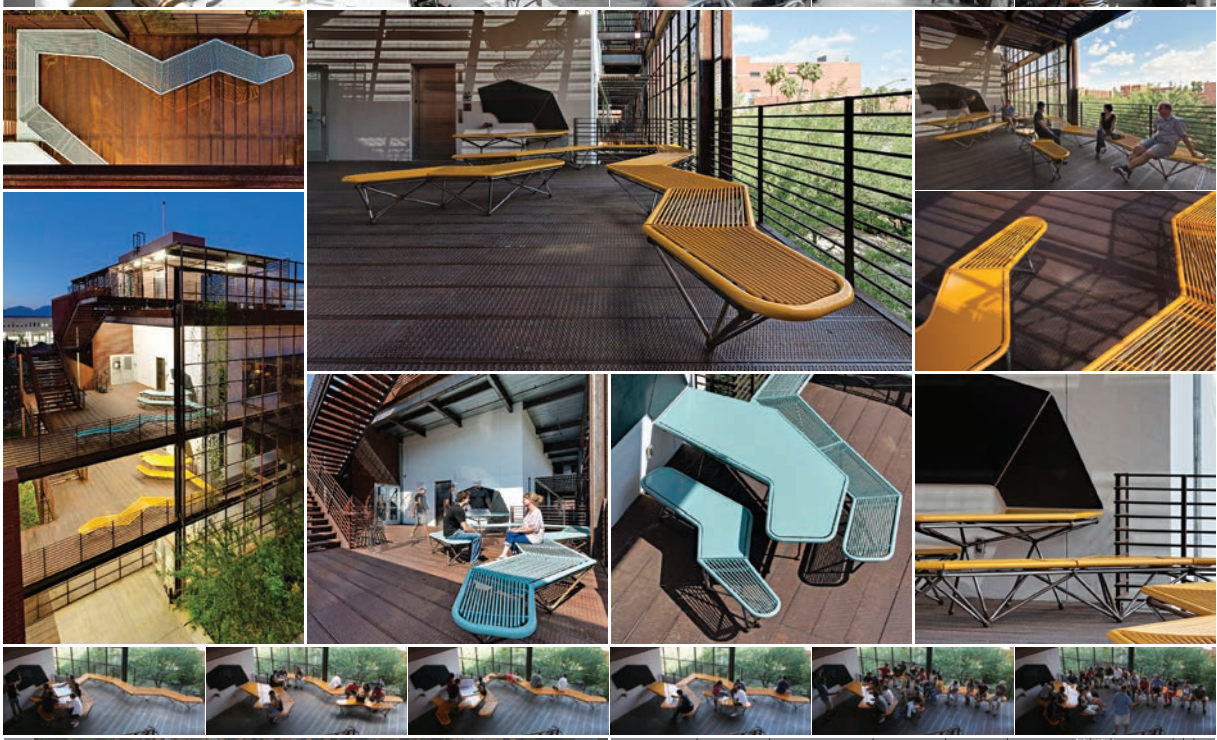
An interpretive, ergonomic and site specific seating area was created. A serpentine geometry was developed and adapted to the conditions of place, respecting the circulation paths of the stairwell and the legal egress from adjacent spaces while preserving access to outward vistas along the guardrails. The geometry incorporates clearances around a nearby standpipe and utilizes the only clear vertical surface for a chalkboard and focal point. The seating surface varies in width to accommodate different modes of sitting and maximizes diverse occupancies ranging from multiple individuals, a few small groups, a combination thereof or groups as large twenty-two. A satellite bench was introduced to maximize the versatility of the design, able to be used as a moveable seat or a low table. The seating and work surfaces are powder-coated and detailed such that the panels can be removed for refinishing. The installation has transformed an under utilized and uninspired interstitial space into a stimulating nexus, subject to constant use and interpretation.



# INTERSTITIAL installation site specific FURNITURE as an ARCHITECTURAL MICROCOSM

This project challenged undergraduate students at the School of Architecture at the University of Arizona to design and build an installation to revitalize the interstitial space between the old and new buildings that comprise the college facilities. The existing space was fertile with programmatic and aesthetic potential but was under utilized and uninspiring. The studio was given \$6000, seven weeks and the use of the school's material laboratory. An interpretive, ergonomic and site specific seating area was created.

The pedagogy employed in this project empowers students to negotiate project-based experiences that are analogous to professional practice, challenging students to engage in anthropological and evidenced-based pre-design research, and work collaboratively to develop designs in response to real world conditions and constraints. Students subsequently develop budgets, schedules, construction and shop drawings, proceeding with fabrication and construction. Transforming the ideal into reality.



**conclusions**

Schedule and budget were critical factors; influencing decisions on design, details, materials and methods of fabrication. The primary design gesture, modest in comparison to the potential of the studio's imagination, was tempered by the logistical reality of 7 weeks and \$6000. The structural frames for the stationary benches, tables and satellite benches are articulating spaces of interlaced pyramids comprised of 1" steel tubes connected via weld to 2" steel spheres. This detail is coarse in comparison to other details we conceived that required precision bending and cast components that were beyond the capabilities of our in-house shop facilities and budget. But this detail afforded us expedience and the flexibility necessary for a student team negotiating relatively complex geometries rendered in a thermally sensitive material such as steel. The studio was respectful of these constraints during the project and appreciative in the end.

Designing for a community of design students and professionals is an opportunity and a risk. The opportunity lies in a user group that is invaluable as an informed and diverse resource for establishing performance criteria and offering feedback during the design process. The risk lies in the evaluation of the product by that same user group that is also opinionated, passionate and divergent. The project and the studio participants' reputations are subject to scrutiny, from the perspective of aesthetics and more importantly performance. The installation has transformed an under utilized and uninspiring interstitial space into a stimulating nexus, subject to constant use and interpretation. Since completion, the studio has received universal accolades from the college community and visiting design professionals.

