

PACIFIC BUSINESS NEWS

DEVELOPMENT

Landscape architect blends natural elements for urban Howard Hughes project

When it came to creating a landscape for The Howard Hughes Corp.'s seventh tower in Honolulu that would blend with an adjacent park space, the developer turned to landscape architect Don Vita, who's designed the landscapes for Hawaii resorts such as the Kukio Golf and Beach Club, Hualalai Resort and the redeveloped Kona Village resort.

The Howard Hughes Corp. tapped Vita, president of San Francisco Bay Area-based Vita Planning and Landscape Architecture, to connect Victoria Ward Park to Victoria Place, a 400-foot tower with 350 luxury condominium units planned for a parcel of land along Ala Moana Boulevard next to its first tower, Waiea, that was once the site of Ward Warehouse.

Vita, who was also the landscape architect for Park Lane Ala Moana, said the Howard Hughes project is the "most urban project we've done in the Islands," and unlike other redevelopments where public space ends up as plazas or other hardscapes.

"In this case, Howard Hughes is making a commitment that's a little different commitment to the people of Honolulu," he said. The gardens will be "much more intimate, more relaxed, much more in tune with what living in Hawaii is all about. This is a very different approach to what a public realm could be in an urban setting."

Vita envisions different designs for the makai side of Victoria Ward Park, next to the Victoria Place tower, and the mauka side adjacent to the Koula tower



Rendering of the gardens at Victoria Place.

COURTESY THE HOWARD HUGHES CORP.

currently under construction, which will have ground-floor commercial space. There, the space will be "more tailored or manicured" with places for people to gather.

The makai side will be more natural with a "native Hawaiian shoreline landscape" that will connect the park with Victoria Place in "subtle transition, from a landscape perspective, between that more wild landscape that emulates the shoreline and the more tailored landscape of the entry to Victoria Place."

While the entrance to the building itself will be secure, the plan is to blur the lines between public and private space.

"One thing I've learned over the course of my career, is being able to create places that really don't necessarily feel like they've been designed," he said. "That's really hard to do sometimes and if we can achieve that goal, I feel we are

successful. The makai park is part of that vision, we need to design less."

Vita's other current high-profile project in Hawaii is master planning the landscape architecture for the Kona Village Resort, which has been closed since suffering major damage from a tsunami in 2011. Owner Kennedy Wilson is redeveloping the 81-acre site near Hualalai Resort into 150 individual guest homes that will be branded as the Kona Village, a Rosewood Resort.

Vita noted that the resort's oceanfront landscape is a very different environment from the one he's working with in Honolulu.

"There we are using almost an entirely native palette," he said. "In particular, we are going to be salvaging some of the seed sources from some of the hala there and propagating them, all the shoreline plants that you'd normally find."