

# 'Water Is Magic' For CRE

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Developers wanting to attract legions of shoppers and tenants to office, retail, multifamily and mixed-use developments can rely on one of nature's greatest resources: water, and lots of it.

From fountains to **crystal lagoons**, streams and rock fixtures, water is the commercial real estate landscape architectural tool that keeps on giving.

Developers of all asset types are leaning into water products, using them to create serene settings for pedestrians and tenants alike.



*Courtesy of OTL*

*A specialty water fountain constructed by OTL for the Legacy West mixed-use development in Plano, Texas.*

“We always say that water is magic,” **LandDesign** principal Heth Kendrick said. “You know there is something where people gravitate towards water, especially if it is some sort of water-quality setting that has an artisanal fountain or something like that. People want to spend time and linger around these kind of elements.”

Water is the oldest tool in landscape architects' arsenal, Kendrick told *Bisnow*. When Central Park in New York was designed well over a century ago, the architect of the famed park chose water as a central landscaping feature.

"Art creates great value; and water features — if kept clean and maintained well — can create interest," **Younger Partners** co-founder **Kathy Permenter** said.

She has seen this at **Campus at Legacy West** and **International Plaza**, which she said have water features that are visually compelling and attract people.

"You often see people dining, congregating and walking in these areas," Permenter said.

Technology has pushed the usage of water over the top in both height and in design, and that is inspiring more development companies to splurge on water fixtures that interact with events, crowds and the properties themselves.

Kendrick said technology makes it easier to filter the water to make sure it is safer for parties to interact with, and it allows for the advanced programming of lights and water features to offer developments complex and interactive designs.



Wikimedia

A Crystal Lagoons man-made lake at an Egypt development

One of the newest concepts in this water world is the lagoon concept, which is being spread rapidly through the U.S. by Chilean company Crystal Lagoon despite the \$600K per acre price tag. In the DFW area, it is slated to be featured in Rockwall and Prosper, and the redevelopment of Collin Creek Mall in Plano is also expected to include a crystal lagoon.

From lagoons to fountains programmed to spray streams of water in unison with music to water features that change colors and serve as backdrops to live concerts or water shows designed to highlight grounds or buildings on the property, almost anything is possible where water is concerned, said John Cunningham, vice president of operations for specialty construction firm OTL.

OTL, which stands for Outside The Lines, is an Orange County, California-based company that builds water features for mixed-use retail developments, office buildings and multifamily complexes.

The firm is experiencing high demand for fixtures at mixed-use and other commercial projects, and recently named Cunningham vice president of operations to guide the company's international expansion.

"We can do just about anything that you can think of in terms of a themed environment," Cunningham said.

In the past, architects associated OTL's construction with the type of water displays generally available at Disney World or high-end resorts, but today, the entire world of commercial real estate is OTL's oyster. The company's water fountains, fixtures and rock formations have become coveted attractions at multifamily, office and mixed-use retail developments across the U.S.



*Courtesy of OTL*

*An OTL-constructed water fountain inside the Village at Meridian in Meridian, Idaho.*

**Legacy West** in West Plano features one of OTL's fountains. The interactive and colorful fountain provides retail and multifamily tenants with a peaceful spot in the middle of a crowded mixed-use development to rest their feet and take in the soothing sounds.

The Village at Meridian in Meridian, Idaho, also incorporates technology-infused water works built by OTL.

"We've seen a lot of evidence that supports the idea that when you have, say, a show fountain or some type of attraction like that in a development where you have not just condos or apartments, but you have restaurants, you have retail, you have hotels, a lot of the space that is sort of adjacent to those attractions becomes extremely valuable. More valuable in fact for the developer who's trying to ... figure out how to program or bring a development to life," Cunningham said.

Multifamily developers in particular are leaning on this product more and more.

The design and development teams of apartment projects are increasingly taking inspiration from resorts and hotels, and water features have come with it, Kendrick said.

"Multifamily has truly embraced water, and a lot of that has to do with the idea of the resort at home, where you are seeing this blurring of the lines between multifamily and hospitality," Kendrick said. "When you think about some of the great hotels of the world, it's that water quality, that front-door feature. It's that element around the pool. It's about that white noise that drains out that city life, it just takes you to a different space."

Crystal Lagoons is **heavily targeting multifamily**, reportedly working with 140 apartment projects in the U.S. and marketing the lagoons as an amenity to residents.

Cunningham agrees multifamily is active for OTL, but he said corporations and universities also want water fixtures to improve the appeal of their campuses.

"All of these places are more and more interested in somehow setting themselves apart and change the feel or the ambiance."

There is a lot of room to be creative with water features, Cunningham said.

"That is what's exciting about the business. It's so wide open to creativity. We back it up with strong engineering and technical folks because it's also construction, so making those two come together is what makes this such an exciting business."

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