

The Shops of Grand River

Photography by Charles Beck



The landscape at The Shops of Grand River pays tribute to the nearby Cahaba River, here with native sandstone, plants and a water cascade.

By Philip Morris



An outlet mall is not the sort of project one expects to be linked to a natural feature, but The Shops of Grand River in Leeds, just east of Birmingham, has been designed and built under the Signature Development Standards of Audubon International to ensure protection of the adjacent Cahaba River.

CMH Architects of Birmingham developed the master plan, architecture and tenant fit-up for the partnership of Daniel Corp. and USS Real Estate. Part of what will be a 6,000-acre Grand River residential and mixed-use development, the 330,000-square-foot first phase (ultimately 520,000-square-foot) center opened last fall off I-20 near Barber Motor Sports Park and Bass Pro Shop.

Buildings are arranged around an open-air mall sheltered by large steel canopies. The paving and landscape evoke the Cahaba River, and rain gardens catch runoff and let it soak into the ground. An enclosed food court serves up to 300. The project received an award from the Cahaba River Society, an environmental group that has long worked to protect the river.



A compelling masonry and steel entrance gate fronting the open-air mall features monumental light towers.



An area covered by a large canopy is used for concerts and other special events. Glass walls enclose the adjacent food court.



Circulation routes are designed like streets with native sandstone and steel canopies providing scale and some cover.