

Darwin Forest Country Park

Little Monkeys Play Centre

Following on from the success of its Evolution Health & Fitness Centre, which provides a highly profitable attraction for guests and locals alike, the Directors at Darwin Forest Country Park decided to extend the principle of tapping into both markets by introducing a state-of-the-art children's play centre.

The Client

Without disturbing the overall impression of peace and tranquility, the Directors of Pinelodge Holidays sought to enhance the appeal of Darwin Forest Country Park to families with pre-school children, who, along with other target groups, are candidates for taking midweek holidays out of season, when the park is at its quietest.

When asking themselves how this appeal could be generated, the Directors were mindful of how the park's Evolution Health & Fitness Centre has been very popular in the local community and they concluded that a state of the art play centre would be ideal. In the colder months it would be in demand from local children, whilst holidaymakers would be attracted by the weather proofing, as well as the additional excitement it provides in the warmer months and at weekends throughout the year.

The Brief

The brief was to build the best play centre of its kind for miles around and to incorporate a well equipped kitchen capable of serving a range of food appealing to all ages. Additionally the

brief included the creation of a separate café, to be supplied from the playcentre kitchen and be available as an additional daytime catering facility for holidaymakers and visitors.

The project was taken on by Pinelodge's Director/Architect Roger Langham and his team: "Play centres are invariably found in rented industrial units on business parks and their design is therefore very restricted. We had no such problems here. We would be able to design and build an imaginative, sustainable and energy efficient building perfectly suited to its purpose and one that would allow the play equipment designers to be expressive too."

"We were encouraged by the positive way the Derbyshire Dales planners reacted to our dramatic Evolution design and decided to complement that building with a contemporary design for our new play centre."





The Specification

Little Monkeys Play Centre is a distinctive, child friendly, arrowhead shaped building, which although when viewed from within the park appears to be single storey, does in fact rise to an apex nine metres high. This allows children the thrill of launching onto the double helix spiral slides and other apparatus from a great height. The name Little Monkeys was chosen because of the park's link with Charles Darwin and the play centre is themed around his exploits in the Galapagos Islands.

The entire structure is timber framed comprising glulam timber posts, beams and purlins. It has three distinct rooflines each of which follow the steeply sloping line of the play frame. The insulated metal composite roof panels are ribbed and coated grey on the outside to be in harmony with the other buildings and smooth and white on the inside to contrast with the exposed timber beams. Two wedge shaped glazed features at either end of the front face cut deep into the roof and throw themselves forward from the building line.

Glazed pods, seemingly at random on the walls and in the roof, have however been positioned over key points in the building and play frame where children congregate. These pods not only add to the user's sense of excitement and reveal to outsiders the fun being had within; they also bring natural light to points where it is needed most.



Reception area and octagonal desk - positioned to ensure every function is easily controlled



Child friendly toilets



Mezzanine viewing room



The two party rooms with acoustic wall folded back

The crèche



Externally the walls are clad in a random, radial pattern with contrasting cream rendered panels and Siberian larch.

The front of the building is set back from the road behind a turfed and paved area. The radial pattern of the paving directs visitors to two entrances – one leading to Reception, whilst the second, leads directly into the Explorers Café.

Internally Little Monkeys is essentially open plan, with smaller rooms and a mezzanine floor inserted into it. This design allowed the play frame manufacturer to install their most exciting equipment whilst still making it easy for parents and staff to keep track of all the children. The kitchen provides a varied menu for children, accompanying adults and the Explorers Café. The building also includes a crèche, two party rooms which hold around 20 children in each and toilets. A folding acoustic wall between the two party rooms means they can be combined for larger parties.

A glass-sided viewing room on a mezzanine floor allows parents to relax and watch their children from an elevated position. This room can also be used as a meeting or function room.

A sophisticated environmental management system uses natural cross flow ventilation, drawing in fresh air from high level vents. This is supplemented by a low energy air conditioning system. Underfloor heating not only keeps the building warm but as users have to discard their shoes before entering the play area it also ensures that their feet stay at a comfortable temperature. All visitors must enter by the octagonal reception desk. This is the hub of the building and is positioned so that every function can be easily monitored.



Brightly coloured materials with secure, soft surfaces are used throughout the child friendly play areas which are finished with carpets in sweeping bands of red, yellow and blue. The attention to detail is exemplified by the toilets, which combine brightly-coloured fittings and dark tiles with practical details such as low sinks for children.

The Little Monkeys kitchen also services the adjacent Explorers Café, with its bistro atmosphere for holiday park guests and passing customers. With its Travertine floor, black granite dado and ash trim it provides a quiet, contemplative atmosphere – a world away from the excitement that is Little Monkeys.

The Benefits

Little Monkeys has only been open for a few months, but early results are very encouraging. "It is already contributing to making Darwin Forest a favourite destination for families with young children and even more importantly, stimulating midweek business from families with pre-school age children." said Pinelodge Holidays Parks Director, Lyndsey Grayson.

"The response from the local community has also been terrific. Word soon got round and it is now used extensively by local families. We have been delighted with the number of party bookings and our new menus have proved very popular."

Client: Pinelodge Holidays
 Location: Darwin Forest Country Park,
 Matlock, Derbyshire

FLOORPLAN

