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Design-forward Metal Columns for High-impact Architecture

By Ernie Ngo

Photos courtesy Móz Designs

Structural elements like columns are a key architectural component of every project—equipping designers with column solutions that simultaneously meet design standards and building requirements enhances project outcomes. Metal columns offer an innovative answer to these standards, with solutions ranging from straightforward column covers intended for high-traffic environments such as airports to intricate design features in an architecturally significant space.

Various shapes

Metal column solutions offer an elevated alternative to traditional columns, creating dynamic visuals that echo the surrounding environment's architecture and stand out as prominent design features. These solutions come in various shapes and sizes. They

are adaptable for use in hospitals, corporate offices, hotels, restaurants, schools, and transit areas requiring the structural support needed for large commercial environments. The construction of these high-traffic spaces often includes rough structural concrete supports, steel beams covered in fireproofing, electrical conduits, plumbing, and highways of data management wiring that are essential, yet unsightly. Incorporating metal column covers in design-forward shapes and patterns conceals these unattractive details while providing the aesthetic versatility to cater to each setting's needs.

When considering the shape of column covers within a space, angular or rounded installations dramatically impact the disposition of an environment. Defined, geometric-shaped columns include hard lines and



straight edges that accentuate a clean, modern feel. Striking and dynamic, these angular solutions evoke alignment and efficiency in commercial settings. For a softer, more calming environment, rounded column solutions create a greater sense of flow, melding into their surroundings while providing greater opportunities for reflective light and seamless movement. Above all, the column solutions' silhouettes should not only match but also enhance the space's architecture for a high visual impact that complements the design of the space.

While the design impact of column solutions' shapes can be endless, installation is simple. Supplying contractors with an architectural element as straightforward to construct as it is to design, pre-manufactured, ready-to-assemble column solutions provide a seamless specification experience from



the columns' conception to installation. Maximizing durability without compromising on quality design, the array of opportunities for column shapes demonstrates the range of metal's architectural capabilities.

Patterns and colors

As columns are intended to cover unsightly structures, they simultaneously add value through thoughtful aesthetics. Incorporating intricate patterns and impactful colors transforms essential supports into dynamic focal points, infusing a space with personality, texture, and movement.

Pattern inspiration can be found in nature when trying to integrate organic textures and graphic patterns echoing natural forms. These biophilic-inspired visuals elevate design and foster a stronger connection to the natural world, a growing trend in commercial architecture. This approach is especially impactful in wellness-oriented spaces such as hospitals, offices, and hospitality environments where calm, organic textures can influence the mood and experience of the user.

Patterns like linear gradients or non-directional textures can elongate and visually expand a column, while maintaining consistency across seams through techniques like reveals. Layered patterns and overlapping forms create depth and complexity, turning vertical surfaces into animated design elements. These same techniques are increasingly applied to column solutions, providing rhythmic movement and multi-dimensional interest within commercial environments.

Communicating the tone of a design, the colors of column solutions enhance an environment's mood, with

Metal column covers conceal structural elements, while distinguishing spaces, and creating dynamic visual interest.

the ability to create the bright, airy feel of light colors or the warm, refined sensation that comes from deep and moody hues. The colors selected for columns also play a role in the perception of a space's size—designers can specify calm, muted shades for an open, spacious atmosphere and bold, darker shades for a dramatic, intimate look and feel. When choosing the shades of column covers, considering how the hue will enhance the environment is an important decision. Whether a vibrant pop of color or a sophisticated

neutral, the colors selected for column solutions bring personality and depth to the spaces they inhabit.

Metal column covers transform structural elements into 3D design features, offering both function and space-defining form. Available in a wide range of patterns and finishes, these solutions combine long-term durability with refined architectural appeal, making them ideal for high-traffic commercial environments.

Material options and finishes

Durable materials are essential in high-traffic public spaces to minimize maintenance and ensure long-term performance. Finishes and materials crafted with hardwearing substances like stainless steel or solid-core aluminum can withstand the wear and tear of high occupancy and disinfectants in commercial spaces. Known for their strength and sustainability, stainless steel and aluminum bring durability and design versatility to column cover applications.

While stainless steel and aluminum are the ideal column cover materials for interiors and exteriors alike, column covers' finish possibilities can further enhance the look and feel of these solutions.

For aluminum columns in high-traffic areas, specifying the right finish is essential. Protective topcoats that resist scuffing and scratching are key to long-term performance, along with gloss or matte options that influence the column's overall appearance. Architectural-grade vinyls offer another durable finish, further extending the column's lifespan. For exterior applications, finishes must be formulated to withstand direct sunlight, abrasion, and exposure to the elements, ensuring the columns maintain their integrity and appearance over time.

Offering a design-forward solution that maintains a high standard of cleanliness and stability in large-scale, high-traffic areas is a crucial component of commercial design. Combatting the unique set of design challenges that come with high occupancy spaces, selecting optimal finishes and reliable metal materials like stainless steel and aluminum ensures durable, long-lasting interior and exterior solutions while rising to meet design intent.

Elevated design features

In tandem with patterns, finishes, shapes, and sizes, metal column solutions can incorporate intentional details and upscale elements like backlit features and laser-cut details into their construction, allowing for many upscale



At Plymouth Public Library, moss-colored columns mimic a blooming flower, transforming the space into a functional work of art.

Case Study: Plymouth Public Library

A recent renovation at the Plymouth Public Library in Massachusetts brings a refined, organic sensibility to the institution's interior, seamlessly blending function with design-forward features. At the heart of this transformation are five statement metal column covers, specified for a rich, nature-inspired moss colorway with a coarse-grain texture. These round columns—each 406.4 mm (16 in.) in diameter and 3 m (10 ft) tall—are fabricated in two half sections of solid 2.3 mm (0.09-in.) aluminum and finished in a durable satin coating. A recessed stainless-steel base and clean vertical butt joints complete the installation, enhancing the architecture with understated sophistication.

Designed to harmonize with the library's ceiling feature—custom petal-shaped forms fabricated from acoustic panels—the column covers act as grounding elements to complement the soft curves and organic palette of the overhead installation. The result is a calming, modern institutional environment that balances durability with elevated visual impact. **Met**

design options that can support the integration of electric features. Taking structural elements to a whole new level, these elevated design features tie the architectural features of the surrounding environment together while creating a focal point that sets the tone for a space's design.

The versatility of column covers allows the solutions to take on the appearance of entirely new materials—

architectural-grade vinyl laminates designed to convey natural materials like stone or wood, overlaid images or graphics significant to the space, engravings of meaningful patterns, or an array of grains to add depth to the space. Metal column covers capture the complexity and feel of these authentic forms while offering a lightweight, cost-efficient opportunity to bring design-forward elements into a shared space.

Laser cut patterns, perforated sheets, engravings, and vinyl films are a few of the many ways column solutions supply high-quality, durable decorative metal features that last in high-traffic public areas. While these elements are impactful alone, coupling these details with LED backlighting adds an entirely new level of physical and visual depth. Turning functional beams into beacons of light, adding luminance behind engaging patterns uplifts commercial settings, elevating structural elements into unique project features.

Adding design-forward details to column solutions brings new layers of dimension, texture, and visual interest to a space. This highlights the surrounding architecture, anchoring the space while adding unique expression. With an understanding of how prominent design features can transform a space, metal column solutions become standout showpieces for any environment.

Regarding the world of shared spaces, contractors need solutions to meet the moment. Metal column covers seamlessly blend design and function for a solution that is as durable as it is aesthetic, offering an array of features that cater to contractors' needs for the individuality of each space. With a straightforward process from specification to installation, column covers grant contractors the ability to configure a solution that features the most desirable details within an environment, whether it be intricate design features for a commercial space's focal point, or a durable finish that is as hard wearing as it is visually intriguing in a high-traffic space. No matter the project, metal column solutions bring aesthetic versatility to structural elements. [M&A](#)

Ernie Ngo is the general manager at Móz Designs, a tenured employee of the metal manufacturer for 30 years. An Architecture graduate from the University of California, Berkeley, Ngo has utilized his talents to inform the design and execution of architectural metal solutions for Móz projects nationwide.



Columns at Yorkdale Shopping Centre feature dynamic graphic motifs and captivating backlighting.

Case Study: Yorkdale Shopping Centre

A recent transformation at Toronto's Yorkdale Shopping Centre elevates the dining experience within its expansive 3,902-m² (42,000-sf) food court through the installation of 21 custom laser-cut columns. Designed to enhance visual and spatial elements, these striking columns serve as dynamic architectural features that activate the food court's central gathering space with bold patterning and refined illumination.

Fabricated from durable aluminum to withstand the demands of high-traffic public environments, the columns showcase biophilic patterns—each cut with precision to reveal flowing, organic forms that balance modernity with warmth. Integrated LED backlighting softly illuminates the patterned surfaces, diffused to create a welcoming glow that shifts throughout the day. More than decorative accents, the columns embody a thoughtful approach to placemaking, inviting diners into a vibrant, design-forward destination that reflects the evolving role of shopping centers as community and lifestyle hubs. [M&A](#)