Empty to Active
At Omgivning, we are placemakers and creative problem-solvers

In Swedish, omgivning means the way a space feels
HW Hellman Building

Location
125 W 4th St
Los Angeles, CA

Client
HW Hellman LP

Status
In Construction (90% complete)

This ten-story, Beaux Arts style building was originally a bank, constructed in 1903 for Herman W. Hellman, a German-born financier and businessman who became one of Los Angeles’ wealthiest residents.

Designed by Alfred F. Rosenheim, the Type I construction made this the first steel-framed structure in Los Angeles. In recent years it was the headquarters of the Community Redevelopment Agency and Banco Popular.

We proposed the adaptive reuse of the offices to 180 live-work lofts. Our design work required the removal of the roof to make way for an additional 37,000 square feet of livable space. The new floors were designed to hold penthouse units and extensive common areas for tenants, as well as a restaurant/bar.

OMGIVNING
First Congregational Church of Pasadena

On a prominent one-acre site, we are working to convert the historic First Congregational Church of Pasadena to eighty residential units, while maintaining the original sanctuary and chapel as an event space and restaurant.

For the sanctuary space we are proposing an 11,000 sf event space, while the adjacent chapel will serve as a 3,000 sf restaurant and co-working space. The primary historic facades will be preserved, as will the interior historic features of the sanctuary space and adjacent Pilgrim Chapel. The secondary facades facing south and east are minimally ornamented reflecting the accessory office and meeting spaces supporting the main sanctuary and chapel. These accessory spaces at the basement, ground and upper floors will be converted to a residential component consisting of 80 units and amenity spaces for tenant wellness. We are also proposing the expansion of the existing central light court further into the lower levels, to bring more light to residential units and create another social space.
Broadway Lofts

This six-story Renaissance Revival style building was designed by the prominent firm Morgan & Walls and completed in 1906, when it held a high-end department store known as Le Bon Marché and later held a series of theaters for movies and vaudeville.

The existing light courts and E-shaped floor plan turned out to be a key element in our conversion of the building from office use to 58 loft apartments, for which we sought to bring as much natural light as possible to each unit. Faced with a tight floor plate, we designed new steel and glass bridges within the existing light courts. These bridges became the primary means of entry to most residences and freed up space for larger, more light-filled spaces.

The building's existing steel framed structure, originally encased in concrete, underwent a seismic retrofit with new concrete shear walls and moment frames. Common area amenities included a new roof deck with a freestanding gym structure. We also redesigned the ground floor core and shell space for retail use.
Las Alturas

Location
421 N Ave 19
Los Angeles, CA

Client
Women Organizing Resources, Knowledge & Services (WORKS)

Status
Complete

Led by the innovative non-profit housing developer WORKS, we teamed with Studio-MLA, IFA, and BuroHappold for Las Alturas, a proposal to reinvent the former Lincoln Heights Jail.

WORKS' mission is to provide affordable housing to its residents, ensuring they are able to access healthy food and receive benefits, health care, job training, and, as appropriate, case management and substance-use programs. Inverting the concept of a jail, our team sought to create an environment where health and growth drive the design program. We wanted to celebrate regeneration at all scales, starting with the building's adaptive reuse and extending to renewable-energy systems and programs that invited the interaction of many demographics.

Our vision for the former jail building included an urban agriculture college and high school with production farms, a health and wellness center, child care and adult day care, 47 market-rate live-work lofts, creative offices, a gastropub, and a rooftop space for dining and events. Adjacent to the existing building would be 66 units of newly constructed affordable housing.
Sears Landmark Building

Location
2650 E Olympic Blvd
Los Angeles, CA

Client
East River Group

Status
90% Complete; CD and permit ready

With an initial phase dating to 1927, this 1.6 million sf building was originally Sears’ west coast mail-order distribution center. It was steadily expanded in eight phased additions, with the final piece completed in 1970. Today, the building comprises at least seven conjoined but structurally independent volumes. Our highly complex design exposes and celebrates the course of the building’s expansion, facilitated through the removal of about 150,000 sf of concrete and the insertion of nine new light courts, one between each of the building’s original phases.

Through horizontal circulation and a central glass elevator, we wanted users to experience the building and its history as never before, moving freely between interior and exterior spaces. Among this building’s challenges, the floor plates were inconsistently sized from one level to the next, complicating our typical details. There were the leaks and irregularities expected from a building erected across a five-decade span. And while the largely austere facades would feel too utilitarian to most, we couldn’t modify the existing structure beyond a narrow set of historical allowances.
Sears Landmark Building

At the ground level, we designed 100,000 sf of interior retail space, adjacent to a spacious food hall flooded with light from newly created openings. Outside, we called for pop-up restaurants in restored boxcars on existing freight-railroad tracks. The second and third floors offer 200,000 sf of creative office space with 21-foot floor heights; upper floors hold 1,030 residential units with unimpeded views. For the 150,000 sf rooftop, we designed two pools, a gym, a theater, sports courts, a spa, and various gardens. We designed a restaurant inside the tower, topped by a single residential unit.

Because tenants for the retail and commercial spaces would remain unknown until well after the conclusion of the core-and-shell scope, we designed spaces that would accommodate a range of uses, with an eye for “optionality” and tenant-directed customization. Similarly, we designed residential units with as much flexibility as the existing space would accommodate.

One of LA’s Historic Cultural Monuments and listed in the National Register of Historic Places, Sears is a prime example of adaptive reuse’s potential. The building’s transformation will offer an array of active-transit options and new connections to its adjacent neighborhoods, especially given its proximity to the evolving LA River.
Reimagining Spaces:
Exploration into Workplace, Multifamily, and Commercial spaces - how are our spaces changing based on pandemic, social / racial crisis, and climate crisis?

Consistent themes for all:
- Human Centered Design
- Flexibility and Adaptability
- Blended Uses
- Economic Context
Reimagining Spaces: Workplaces
- Not necessarily less sf needed
- Approx 30-60% of “office” workforce will WFH part time.
- More gathering spaces in the office
- More flexibility and adaptability (hoteling desks)
- Less open plan, more pods
Reuse of Light Industrial
- Bow truss, early industrial buildings
- Inward focus, no pedestrian experience
Industrial to Workplace
- Outdoor space priority
- Shared space (co-working) will not decrease, but increase especially outside of major city centers
Industrial to Housing
- Community driven
- Private and Social outdoor spaces
Reimagining Spaces: Ground Floor Retail
Pre-pandemic – ground floor retail was struggling

Existing Floor Plan

View from Street

Existing Urban Commercial Space

- **Existing Walls**
- **Existing Space To Remain**
- **Ceiling Above**

Empty to Active
Ground Floor Restaurant + Office

- Reuse of restaurants
- Restaurant spaces typically fulfill creative office requirements for lounge/bar/gathering/meeting space
Ground Floor Maker’s Live/Work Collective
- Concept of Food Hall or Jewelry Center (smaller spaces, more affordable)
- Commerce and Fabrication
- Eyes on the street, engagement
Reimagining Spaces: Multifamily
Case Study: Downtown Los Angeles Mixed Use
- Interconnection of Common Areas: Roof, Typical floors and Ground Floor
- Biophilia
- Roof farming and community kitchens
- Roof work pods
Case Study: Downtown Los Angeles Mixed Use
- Ground floor residential common areas
- Blended with retail/restaurant spaces to create building community, neighborhood vibe, and destination experience

Ground Floor Axonometric

Ground Floor Uses
1. Bar
2. Local Grocer
3. Work
4. Mail room / Lounge
5. Retail Pop-up
6. Food & Dining
7. Back of House
8. Vertical Circulation
Reimagining Spaces: Urban Reprogramming
Underutilized retail spaces adaptive reuse for housing

Strip shopping centers
Reimagining Big Box stores
- Big box hold 8.5 billion SF or 25 sf per person
- The fall of Toys R Us has left 800 vacant stores
- One Costco could hold 110 large family units
- Private, common and community outdoor space