



Reimagining Spaces: A Post-Pandemic Design Report
By Omgivning

At this very moment, cities all around the world are experiencing the same irreversible shifts caused by the current health, race, and climate crises. The effects of those crises couldn't be clearer than here in Downtown Los Angeles. What has steadily become the “it” neighborhood of L.A. has fallen into temporary decline due to stay-at-home protocols and the domino effect of the aforementioned crises. The game of downtown has changed. In real time, we are seeing what works and what doesn't for the built environment.

[Omgivning](#), our downtown-based Architecture and Interior Design firm, uses design to revitalize the spirit of a building. We specialize in the adaptive reuse of underutilized, historic, or existing buildings all over the city. Adaptive reuse focuses on bringing buildings that have outlived their original programmatic function to a new purpose that is aligned with social and economic needs.



Like many in our field, Omgivning has been moving forward with exploring new design theories for this unprecedented moment. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the urgency and importance of design innovation, making it imperative to improve the way our spaces feel and how they function.

To showcase our findings, *Reimagining Spaces: A Post-Pandemic Design Report* is a three-part series documenting our reinterpretation of design in this new era by reimagining three types of spaces: **Workplace,**

Multifamily, and Commercial.

While developing our concepts, we uncovered certain themes recurring consistently across all three types of spaces:

Theme 1: The Need to Prioritize Human-Centered Design

Human-centered design compels us to create balance with socialization, nature, promote ergonomics, diversity, and facilitate wellbeing.

Theme 2: Flexibility and Adaptability are Now Crucial to Success

Design buildings and spaces with enough adaptability and daily flexibility to transform spaces for different uses.



Theme 3: Going Beyond Mixed Use with Blended Uses

We are moving from “mixed-use” toward *blended* uses, where individual interior spaces serve multiple functions simultaneously. We must be able to do just about anything, anywhere, at any time.

Theme 4: A Space is Inextricable from its Economic Context

As economic inequality increases, we must acknowledge our power to design spaces where a high quality of life is more attainable for more people. Likewise, during any downturn, residents and businesses must cut back and get creative in their design and operation.

WORKPLACE



What’s Next For Where We Work?

To understand the future of office spaces before and after the pandemic, we generated a test case to help us imagine the possibilities. We assumed a mid-sized firm of 40 people and a typical +/- 7000 SF office floor plate as found at our project [The Trust Building](#) in Downtown. Through this spatial study and workplace observations, we designed concepts that could be applied to spaces for short and long term solutions.

Transforming the Workplace Concept

Our first concept for the workplace explores the power of transformation using small, self-contained work pods.



Open-plan workplaces with large CEO private offices have crucial flaws like lack of sound control and privacy. These spaces can, instead, be subdivided and filled with small modular pods to alleviate issues with acoustic privacy, the ability to focus, and a place to feel safe.

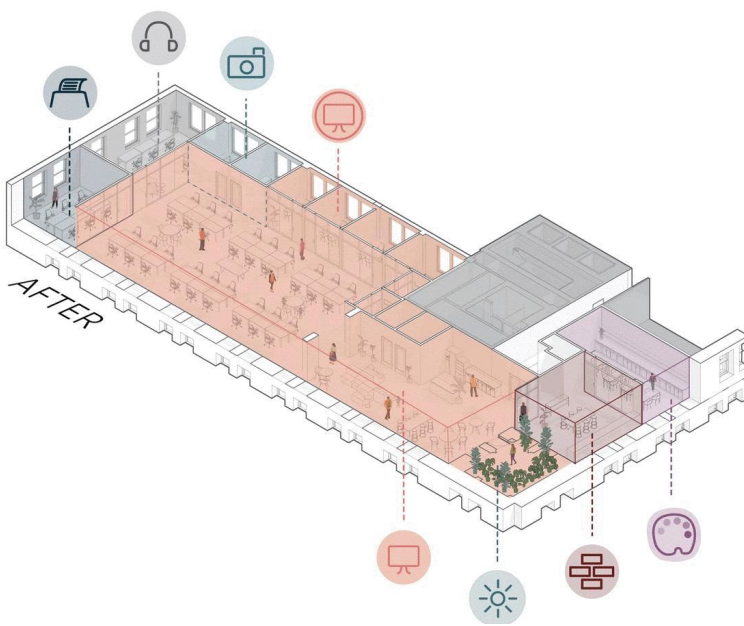
An in-depth analysis of our pod concepts (The View Pod, Meeting Pod, Open Pod, Mobile Pod) can be found in our [Journal](#).

Leveraging the Workplace Concept

We've designed three different solutions to help tenants leverage underutilized square footage in a given space.

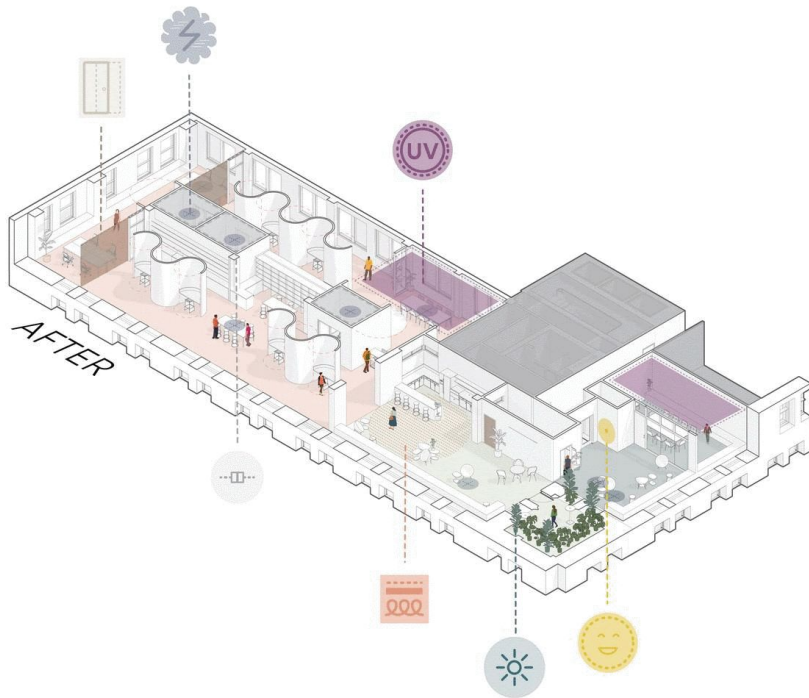
These solutions would obtain additional revenue through sharing tenant spaces or sub tenancies that support the need of other tenants in the building. They also consider one of the most crucial needs for our return to workspaces: providing safe spaces to gather.

Additional creative rearrangements for working, socializing, and generating revenue through shared and gathering spaces can be found [here](#).

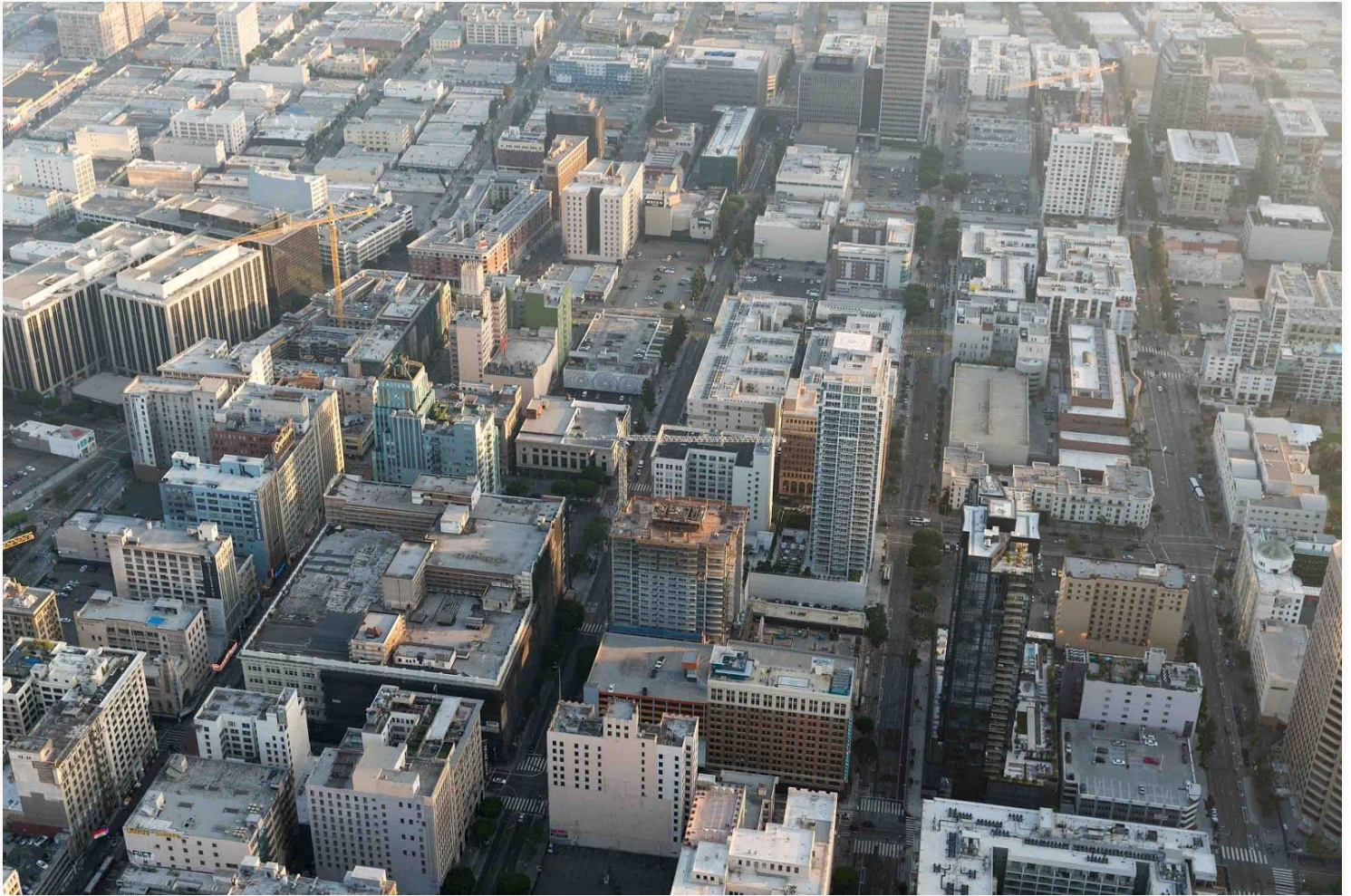


Adapting the Workplace Concept

Adaptation for a post-pandemic workplace includes a greater emphasis on safety and wellbeing, using antimicrobial finishes, touchless devices, increased air purification, and germ-eliminating UV lights. These all create a sense of ease in an environment where we are more hyper aware of hygienic spaces.



Continue reading the full, free report of these concepts in [Reimagining Spaces Workplace Edition](#).



How do we Reprogram the Urban Landscape?

Due to the economic shifts caused by the pandemic, the commercial sector of Downtown (and beyond) will experience long term shifts in how its spaces are used. Increased vacancies and dwindling revenue already loomed large for retail spaces prior to the pandemic, which will likely impact many forms of commercial space, including office, retail, and restaurants. Given these new market conditions, experts anticipate that 90% of real estate development in the next decade will focus on the renovation and reuse of existing structures. Omgivning's focus on the creative reuse of commercial spaces allows us to navigate this unprecedented landscape with innovative and cost-effective solutions. There is profound socioeconomic and cultural value in reusing our existing building stock.

"The greenest building is the one that is already built."

- [Carl Elefante, FAIA](#)

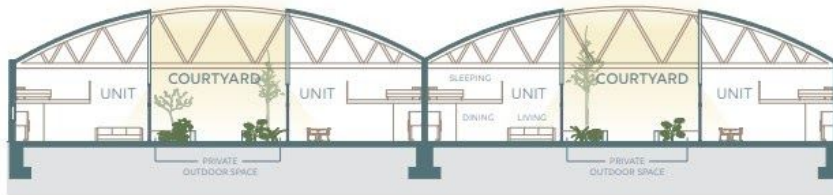
To understand the future of urban spaces, we analyzed existing conditions at specific sites in and outside of Downtown. Through these studies, we have developed several concepts that highlight building or space types that, even prior to the pandemic, were underutilized. These concepts include the reuse of commercial ground floor spaces and industrial warehouse districts, as well as strip malls and big box stores.

[Adaptive Reuse of Industrial Buildings Concept](#)

In and around the edges of Downtown, there are large districts with industrial and warehouse buildings that sit vacant or underutilized, lacking any vision for their reuse.

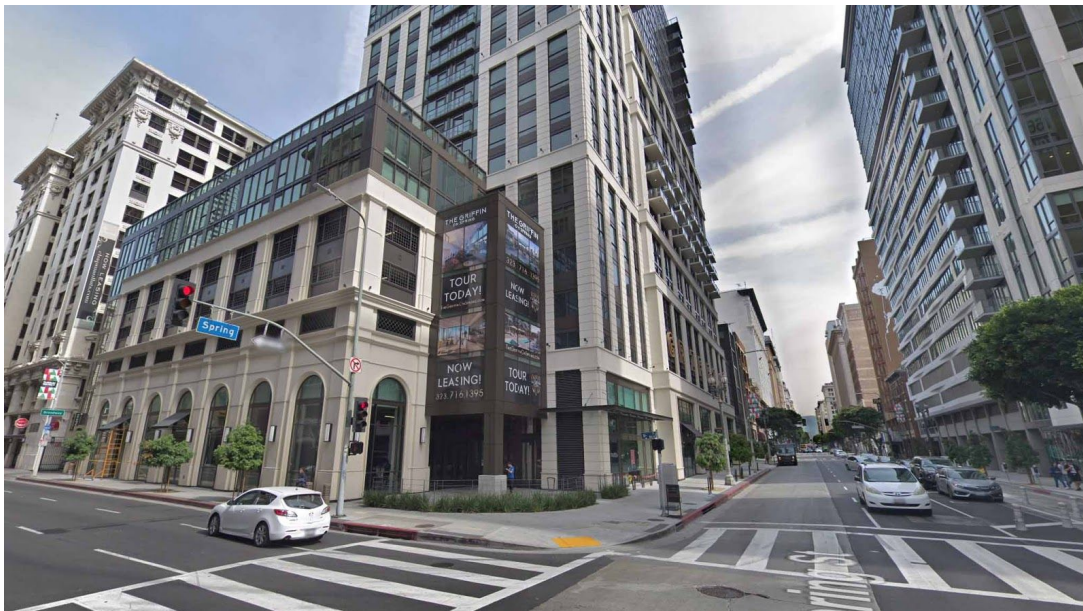
Vacant buildings in industrial areas are prime for revitalization given the richness of their character, contribution to their respective neighborhood, and the scale of their potential contribution to our city's future. They possess desirable features like brick walls, bow trusses, and high ceilings that can all be incorporated into affordable live/work, multi-family housing, or shared workspace.

Building Section

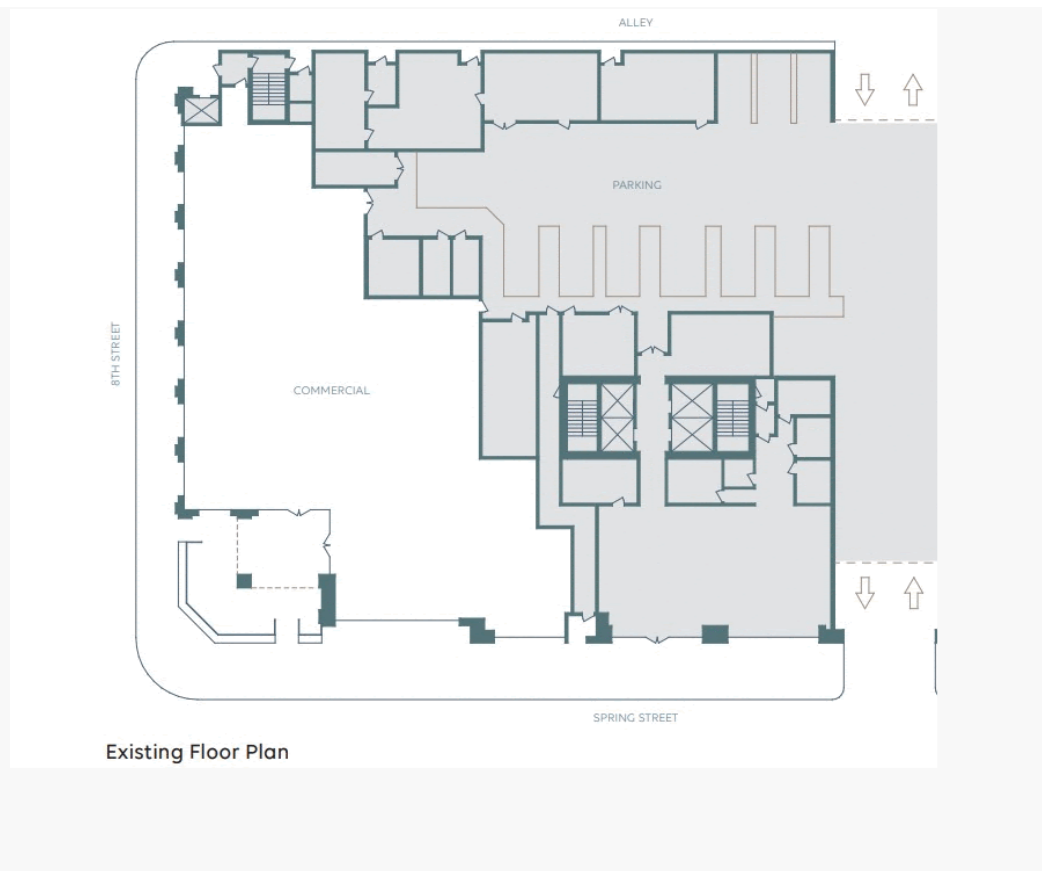


Conceptual Floor Plan

[Reprogramming Ground Floor Commercial Spaces Concept](#)



In Downtown, ground floor commercial spaces are suffering from vacancies. Through creative thinking and blended uses, ground floor spaces can be reinvigorated to create revenue, make sure the lights stay on, and help tenants engage the adjacent street frontage, allowing the



Existing Floor Plan

surrounding community to thrive.

This example focuses on activating a ground floor commercial space at the corner of the Griffin, an Omgiving interiors project located at the corner of 8th St. and Spring St.

[Both options](#) (shown in this gif) seek to energize an empty corner in the Fashion District. The intent here goes beyond the standards of traditional commercial spaces, allowing the space to become a platform for the micro-communities in the immediate area.

[The Restaurant/Office Hybrid](#) conceptual floor plan we've developed welcomes both office and restaurant use by sharing the varied seating arrangements provided by the restaurant to accommodate both individual work and team collaboration. By sharing this significant amount of space, the office can keep rental costs down while directly bolstering the restaurant space.



Going outside of Downtown, every city in the country has a stock of existing buildings that can benefit from reprogramming. Underutilized [big box stores](#) and [strip malls](#) are valuable structures that can be reused to aid the city's desperate need of housing. The [Urban Reprogramming edition](#) of *Reimagining Spaces* goes into detail on reusing these properties rather than tearing them down, using case studies of the Costco in Atwater Village and the ubiquitous mini mall in West Los Angeles.

MULTIFAMILY



How can we transform Multifamily Living?

According to [Preservation Positive](#), a report released by the LA Conservancy in 2020, approximately 60% of Angelenos rent while the city remains in the middle of an ongoing housing crisis. Rather than build itself out of this crisis, where the average cost to produce one new unit of affordable housing is at least \$400,000, we're seeking a more cost-effective, creative, and sustainable approach. Through enhancing the city's residential stock in existing buildings, we can help fill the gap toward achieving the City's housing goals.

For the final edition of [Reimagining Spaces](#), we give consideration to the urban and human scales together in our housing projects by developing concepts that create interconnected communities and adaptable living arrangements.



Humanizing the Urban Experience Concept

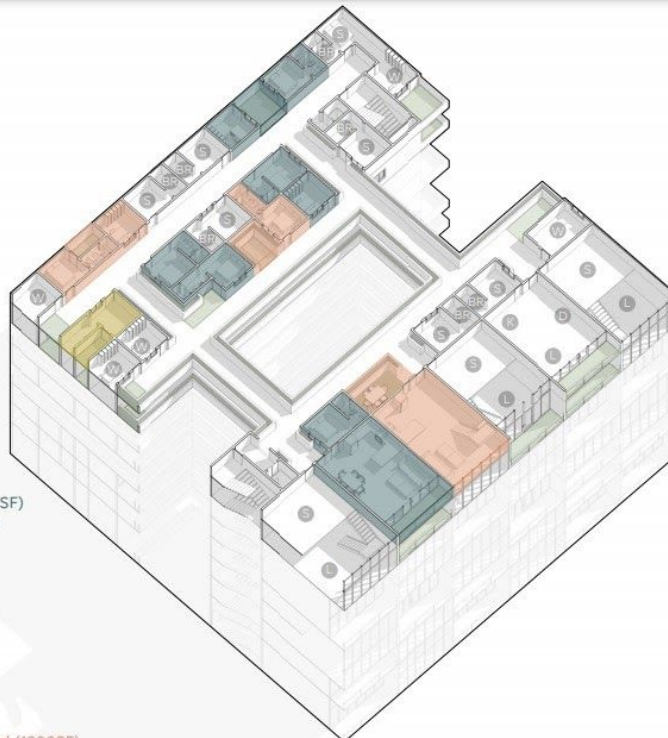
Densification in cities will continue, but shouldn't do so at the expense of quality of life. Design must find ways to ensure greater connections to the outdoors, expand options for use, and provide more affordability to urban living.

Legend

- Ⓜ Work Space
- Ⓢ Sleeping Space
- Ⓟ Bathroom
- Ⓛ Living
- Ⓚ Kitchen

Family Unit Types

- Family Type #1**
 "6 Roommates"
 • Shared main living space, outdoor space
 + 1 roommate sleeping (850SF)
 • 1 roommate sleeping space (150SF)
 • 1 roommate sleeping + outdoor space (200SF)
 • 1 roommate sleeping + work space (250SF)
 • 2 roommate sleeping, work
 + outdoor space (350SF)
- Family Type #2**
 "Single Adult"
 • Sleeping + outdoor space (250SF)
- Family Type #3**
 "Multi-generational"
 • Shared main living, outdoor,
 + 2 sleeping space for parent and young child (1200SF)
 • Grandparent sleeping, work + outdoor space (300SF)
 • Adult child sleeping + outdoor space (250SF)
- Outdoor Space



Apartment Building Axonometric

This concept makes the traditional apartment space modular. Units start with a studio space with the ability to rent 10'x10' additional indoor or outdoor spaces connected to or separated from the main apartment. Adapting a place to match our evolving lives, these modules can facilitate a growing/multigenerational family, roommates, or a workspace.

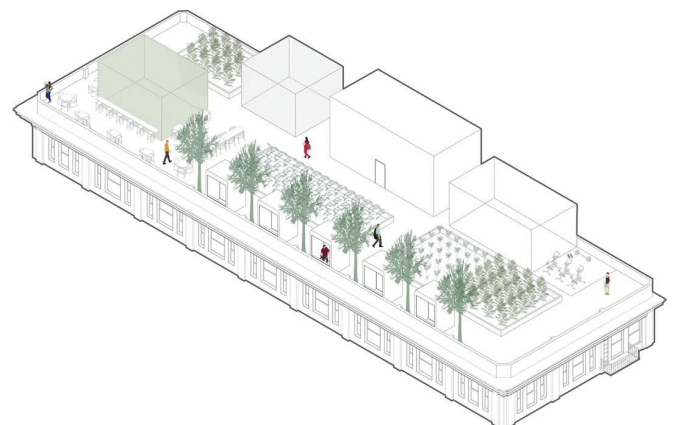
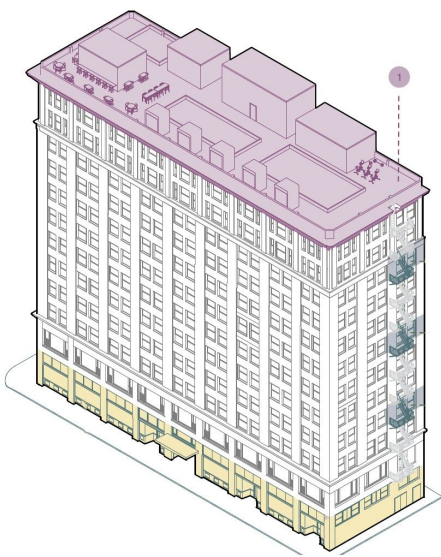
Opening up the center of the building creates an outdoor light court filling the building with natural light. This allows tenants to circulate the building “outside” instead of confined in enclosed hallways.



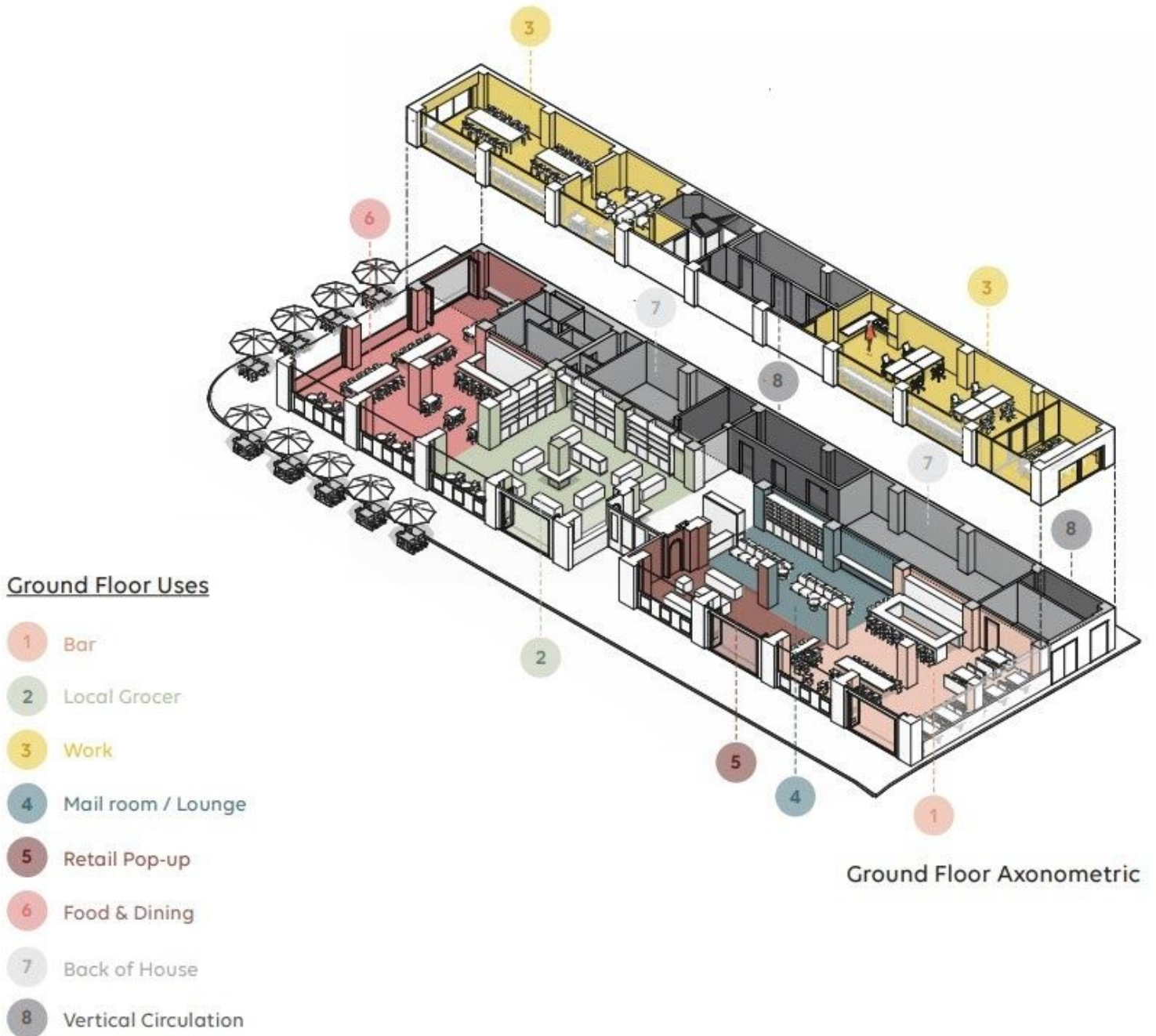
[Interconnectivity of Common Spaces Concept](#)

Working from home during a pandemic means being in one space for much more time than previously expected, which affects our wellness. There are profound opportunities to emphasize a connection to nature, expand private work options in communal environments, and introduce on-site commerce. While richly programmed amenity spaces are now generally included in urban multifamily buildings, these *new* spaces can positively impact our socialization and well-being.

CATERING KITCHEN / LOUNGE



Rooftops on downtown buildings can upgrade communal spaces with catering kitchens, urban farming, and modular work pods, in addition to the typical gym and lounge area that are usually provided. Working from home has made a private workspace a valuable amenity. Partitioned pods allow for privacy yet keep an open-air city view.



Ground floor spaces in residential buildings often suffer from high turnover and vacancy rates, as they rarely sync up with the needs of the residents. Integrating the needs of the tenant *blended* with neighborhood community desires can create engaged, active spaces that benefit the building owner, residents, the community, and even the city at large.

This General Store concept activates the commercial ground floor of a residential building by addressing the needs of the residents through retail, market, lounge, dining, and coworking. This creates a self-sustaining, blended

community, connecting the building and its residents. This example has a bar, coworking space, and the mailroom/lounge, where even getting your mail becomes a communal opportunity.

Transforming Living Spaces Concept

The need for versatility in our spaces has never been more apparent in contemporary life. Components must be designed to be "both/and" solutions to meet multiple needs, as opposed to "either/or" that only allow for a single use. The principles of human-centered design create new and impactful solutions that allow for this adaptability and flexibility like carving out indoor-outdoor spaces, creating storage in underutilized areas like entry vestibules, and convertible furniture like fold-up tables and murphy beds. All of these built-in amenities easily upgrade small spaces.



[Reimagining Spaces: Multifamily](#) edition covers these concepts in more depth.

The pandemic has shifted the way we see space. Our exploration of design characteristics in this new era has brought forth many ideas for change, but they all revolve around our humanity. We can tap into this humanity through design. Together, we can reveal and attain a site's highest and best use, even under challenging conditions. We implore developers, owners, brokers, and our fellow designers to take these findings to heart. Let's make the changes our society deserves.

OMGIVNING

At Omgivning, we are placemakers and creative problem-solvers. In Swedish, *omgivning* means *the way a space feels*. We breathe new life into urban spaces by designing environments that bring people together amid warmth and vitality.

We started this firm in 2009, with the mission of being a leader in revitalizing downtown Los Angeles through the adaptive reuse of existing buildings. Our goal was to interconnect Architecture and Interior Design as one to create spaces that had an authentic identity.

At Omgivning, we believe that our projects exist on a “macro to micro” continuum, a spectrum that incorporates all scales of impact, from policy and large-scale site planning down to the finished details of an interior space.

Today, our design staff has touched almost 400 projects (Broadway Trade, Broadway Lofts, The Griffin, The Globe Theatre, Piano Lofts, Desmond’s, Dearden’s), from small local cafes (Don Francisco’s Casa Cubana) to a two-million square foot historic landmark (Sears Landmark). We create new, programmatically rich hotels, multi-family housing, restaurants, bars, creative offices, theaters, and even design custom furniture. We now have a staff of 40 and are extending our revitalization capacities to neighborhoods beyond Southern California.

We’d love to hear from you. Follow us:

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[Reimagining Spaces: Urban Reprogramming Commercial Design](#)

[Reimagining Spaces: Workplace Design](#)

[Reimagining Spaces: Multifamily](#)