

## Top Loft

Ten loft projects stand out for their innovative design, use of sustainable strategies, creative application of urban design principles, position as catalysts for economic development—or some combination of the above.

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 20TH century, artists in lower Manhattan began squatting in unused industrial buildings. They made it adventurous to live in rough-edged spaces with high ceilings, open floor plans, exposed walls and ducts, and out-sized windows. In the decades since, the cachet of lofts has snowballed and spread west. Cities small and large use loft projects to revive moribund downtowns with the aid of federal and local tax credits, which encourage builders to rehabilitate historic properties, and a soft office market, which makes it attractive to convert commercial buildings to create residences. And young, affluent trend-watchers are drawn to unconventional living spaces in dense, active parts of cities. Over the years, developers and designers have stretched the housing type in new

ways, particularly on the West Coast. The following ten loft projects—all completed in the past ten years—stand out for their innovative design, their use of sustainable strategies, their creative application of urban design principles, their role as catalysts for economic development, or some combination of these attributes. (They are listed in alphabetical order.)

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### 1. 1310 East Union

#### SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

Developer: Dunn & Hobbes, LLC

Architect: Miller Hull Partnership, LLP

An eight-unit mid rise, 1310 East Union offers a case study in making the most of a tight site. The urban infill lot was a slight 40 feet by 80 feet, neighboring structures came right up to the property's edge to the east and west, and zoning limited the height to 65 feet. Fabrication of the steel frame structure largely off site solved the challenges of construction staging on a cramped site. The exposed structure, with its floor-to-ceiling glass and X-bracing down the center, also helps give the building its distinctive look. Hydraulic parking lifts stack two cars in each parking space. Aluminum-and-glass roll-up garage doors on each unit allow occupants to expose their entire living space to fresh air. (See "Small Site, Lofty Ideas," November/December 2003, page 33.)





## 2. Folsom Dore Apartments

### SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Developer: Citizens Housing Corporation

Architect: David Baker + Partners, Architects

The existing brick warehouse facade of Folsom Dore Apartments has been recycled and integrated into the new construction's colorful, warmly modern aesthetic of horizontal and vertical forms. The 98-unit concrete structure incorporated fly ash, a waste byproduct of coal combustion, thereby reducing the requirement for cement, the production of which is widely known for releasing greenhouse gases. Use of compact fluorescent lighting and Energy Star-rated appliances in every unit lowers energy consumption, while rooftop photovoltaic panels supply green energy. To cut dependence on automobiles, the parking garage includes only 30 parking spaces—including four designated for car sharing—as well as 28 bicycle spaces. The building provides a light-filled, warmly modernist home for households with special needs, such as physical or developmental disabilities or HIV/AIDS-related illnesses, and those on low incomes. (See "Best Affordable Housing Projects Named," page 24, January.)



## 3. K Lofts

### SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Developer and Architect: Jonathan Segal Architect

The Golden Hill neighborhood, a once-deteriorating area of downtown San Diego that is currently being revived, has a number of historic single-family homes. They now have a colorful modern neighbor, one that adds denser, less expensive housing without being out of scale. K Lofts, which fits nine units into 9,000 square feet, went through a participatory design process that included city officials, residents, and other community members. A former con-

venience store building on the site supports a new second story, allowing five two-story apartments to be inserted; the other units occupy two new structures. Bright primary colors, steel cladding, various textures, and a collage of horizontal and vertical rectangular forms are all part of the project's vibrancy. Built for \$82 a square foot, the project mixes low-income, affordable, and market-rate rental units, all with large private outdoor spaces.





#### 4. Lofts at Denver Dry

##### DENVER, COLORADO

Developer: Denver Urban Renewal Authority and the Affordable Housing Development Corporation

Architect: The Lawrence Group

Renovation of the former Denver Dry Goods department store into a mixed-use, mixed-income residential building was an early stimulus in downtown Denver's recent revitalization. In the 1990s, the central business district was plagued by retail vacancies, with unused historic buildings threatened by the wrecking ball. The Denver Urban Renewal Authority and the Affordable Housing Development Corporation joined to renovate the turn-of-the-century Denver Dry Building for retail and office uses, with residential lofts on the upper floors, including 51 rental units (40 affordable housing) and 66 market-rate condominiums. All windows have energy-efficient glazing and double panes, most apartments rely on evaporative coolers instead of air conditioners, and the city's central steam system supplies heat. Since the lofts' completion in 1998, at least 20 historic buildings in the surrounding area have been renovated into similar mixed-use, mixed-income projects.

#### 5. Met Lofts

##### LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Developer: Forest City Residential West, Inc.

Architect: Johnson Fain Partners

To revitalize downtowns, cities are looking to pull in more young professionals as residents. Met Lofts is in a prime South Park location: across from the Staples Center, it is an easy walk from the business district and the downtown Los Angeles nightlife. The design has a hip Bauhaus feel—eight stories of exposed concrete and corrugated steel cladding that contain 274 loft-style apartment units and 11,000 square feet of ground-level retail space. The amenities are designed to encourage social gatherings, with a private courtyard, a lap pool, a barbecue area, and a private projection room for movie nights. The project also makes innovative use of Los Angeles's 1 percent public art requirement: the entry walkway has a digital carpet of light-emitting diodes. As people walk on the carpet, they activate corresponding lights on the building's facade. The kinetic display embodies the energy the younger crowd is bringing back to the urban core.





## 6. Midtown Lofts

### MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

Developer: Lander Sherman Urban Development

Architect: Elness Swenson Graham

Once a railway corridor, the Midtown Greenway now connects Lake Calhoun to the Mississippi River with bike and walking paths. Close to uptown Minneapolis, Midtown Lofts places three buildings with 72 units of townhouses and lofts directly on the greenway on a former industrial site, close to bus routes, downtown, and freeway access. A composition of varied forms and textures of steel, corrugated metal, red brick, and colored concrete and stucco gives the two-and-a-half-story buildings a liveliness that complements the residential neighborhood without overwhelming it. South-facing buildings are set back from the greenway to create more open space, and parking is concealed underground. While all the units have energy-efficient appliances and recycled carpeting, one unit in particular serves as a showcase for green design with its water-efficient plumbing, recycled materials, and low-volatile-organic-compound paint.



## 7. Orenco Station

### HILLSBORO, OREGON

Developer: Pacific Realty Associates and Costa Pacific Communities

Architect (for town center and lofts): Fletcher Farr Ayotte

New urbanist projects sometimes are criticized for overrelying on traditional housing types. The 22 two-story industrial-style condominiums at Orenco Station's town center show that contemporary lofts can fit right in as part of a transit-oriented development in the new urbanism mode. Located 15 miles from Portland on a greenfield site around a new Tri-Met MAX light-rail line, Orenco Station includes a variety of housing types, from live/work townhouses to single-family detached homes. The project's focal point is the mixed-use town center, located within walking distance of the light-rail station. Brick-and-wood facades, bay windows, street trees, wide sidewalks, benches, and street pavers help give the town center its distinctive character. On the ground floor beneath the lofts are small neighborhood shops and restaurants, almost all locally owned.



## 8. Santana Row

### SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA

Developer: Federal Realty Investment Trust

Architect (for lofts): BAR Architects

With 18 restaurants and 70 shops—both upscale national chains and local stores—Santana Row is mostly known as a place to shop. But the attention to creating a well-detailed European-style shopping street gives the residents above the stores an unusually active and pleasant urban environment in which to live and hang out. About three miles from downtown San Jose, the 42-acre development covers several blocks, with 198 loft condominiums as well as for-sale and rental luxury townhouses. The two block-long loft buildings, dubbed the DeForest and the Margo, take their cues from turn-of-the-century industrial structures, with facades broken into sections and ground-floor retail arcades. The project's main street is divided by planters and a linear plaza that includes elements imported from Europe—pottery, fountains, and the facade of a French chapel.



## 9. Westminster Lofts

### PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

Developer: Cornish Associates LP and Keen Development Corp.

Architect: Durkee, Brown, Viveiros, & Werenfels Architects

Like most older cities in the United States, Providence is working to rejuvenate its downtown, taking advantage of its turn-of-the-century commercial buildings. Part of that effort is focused on the arts and entertainment district known locally as Downcity, until recently a largely vacant eight-block area of downtown. Now four of those blocks are home to Westminster Lofts, a mixed-use project comprising six historic buildings with restored exteriors and modernized interiors housing 196 residential units. The project's cornerstone is the Peerless, a 230,000-square-foot conglomeration of seven buildings. (See "Providence Trust," page 90, January.) To bring light to the building's 97 loft residences, a seven-story atrium was created in the structure's center by stripping away wood flooring and decking in order to turn the cast-iron columns and beams into a sculptural centerpiece.



## 10. Yerba Buena Lofts

### SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

Developer: Tansev & Associates

Architect: Stanley Saitowitz Office/Natoma Architects, Inc.

Too often San Francisco residential architecture lives in the long shadow of the Victorian era, and even some brand-new loft buildings defer to old-fashioned precedents. Perhaps because the city is progressive politically and socially, inhabitants want to fall back on the familiar for their homes. But Yerba Buena Lofts, completed in 2002, pushes the envelope with a clean modernist vision that responds to the region without mimicking styles. Located in the South of Market Area, the ten-story, 200-unit building is composed of cast-in-place concrete, glass, and steel. The city's ubiquitous bay windows, reinterpreted as translucent glass cubes, alternate with balconies to create a distinctive rhythm. With ceilings nearly 17 feet high, the floor-to-ceiling glass floods the lofts with light during the day and gives the building a glow at night.