

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.)

RON NYREN is a freelance writer based in the San Francisco Bay area.

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.)

