

East Village Arts District Reborn By Renovations

4th + Linden Adaptive Reuse Project Builds 'Synergy' In Downtown Long Beach



Rand Foster, left, and Kerstin Kansteiner take a look at their new East Village storefronts. Foster owns Fingerprints record store, which relocated from Belmont Shore, and Kansteiner recently opened Berlin cafe. She also owns the Portfolio Coffeehouse at 4th and Junipero. (Photograph by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)

■ By **SEAN BELK**
Staff Writer

While most commercial projects are still stymied by the economic downturn, there's one pocket of Long Beach where business is swiftly taking a new form.

A mixture of public seed money, infrastructure improvements, private investment and an innovative approach to redevelopment in the past year has transformed this small corridor on the northern section of the East Village Arts District. A wave of interest has come from local patrons and independent businesses, willing to put their money and confidence into a once dilapidated set of old buildings at 4th Street and Linden Avenue.

"It was kind of a freak incident," said Michael Bohn, principal for Studio One Eleven at Perkowitz + Ruth Architects, one of the lead investors. "We were shown these three buildings and I think we were all so turned off by how it looked . . . After a few months we came around and thought this might be a good development project."

Bohn and principal architect Alan Pullman pulled together local investors to create what are now called the East Village

Creative Offices, anchored by Lyons Art Supply, which moved into the building from across the street. The adaptive reuse project involved converting a 20,000-square-foot parcel, once used as a warehouse and cat sanctuary, into retail space and eight one- and two-story incubator office suites, with a strategically formed front courtyard and covered parking garage, geared toward the creative class.

The newly renovated 4th + Linden project has most recently garnered an honorable mention for the Congress for the New Urbanism's prestigious and international 2011 Charter Awards. The venture has also had a ripple effect in the East Village. After many efforts to revitalize this section of downtown, there appears a budding interest from business owners and prospective buyers, now looking to move in.

Most notably, the nationally known record store Fingerprints, owned by Rand Foster, just relocated here from its 17-year home in Belmont Shore. Kerstin Kansteiner, owner of Portfolio Coffeehouse, just opened a new coffee shop and eatery called Berlin, which she soon hopes to turn into a full-kitchen restaurant, serving breakfast, lunch and dinner. Both businesses have partnered up side-by-side to share the same customer base at the

Lyons' old building, owned by Kurt Schneider, providing a new venue that has been missing from this particular block.

The potential has also drawn a new vegan bakery and punk rock record store around the corner, along with the city installing more than 50 new light fixtures along 4th Street, adding to the atmosphere and safety.

"I think they all work together to catalyze the community," Pullman said. "We want to see a lot more of it happening. We think this is just the beginning of some development at this portion of the East Village."

New Take On Redevelopment

At the outset, the 4th + Linden complex, originally a place famous for pressing vinyl records, was, at first glance, unattractive, with cracked vinyl flooring, hanging fluorescent lights and graffiti, Bohn said. But with the help of about \$400,000 in funding from the Long Beach Redevelopment Agency, and local investment, the buildings have been salvaged with scrupulous façade improvements, while maintaining the historic shell of the original structures.

What was discovered through the renovation was the genuine character of the buildings that hadn't been revealed in decades, he said. Interior wood trusses, structural brick walls and possibly the city's oldest exterior Art Deco frieze of palm leaves were found beneath a thick layer of weathered wood siding and stucco. Today, those features have been preserved and restored, all of which has added to the marketability of the buildings.

"The typical redevelopment philosophy that exists in a lot of cities is where they come in and just clear cut entire sites almost like a forest," Bohn said. "We think this is a much [better way] of creating a community, to keep some of the history, to create a unique sense of place and to attract a different type of resident or someone that wants to work in the downtown."

Pullman said renovating an older building is often a more sustainable practice than starting from the ground up, since most materials can be recycled into the design of the building. In fact, the project was one of the first new commercial structures to follow the city's new Green Building code. He added that adaptive reuse is also cheaper in the long run. "One of the great things about a downtown like this is there are a lot of really nice, older buildings and I think one of our philosophies for adaptive reuse has been [it's] sustainable and it's economically feasible," he said. "It's one of the ways to help keep a city vital, and this is a good example."

Although redevelopment funding helped, more important for such a development to take shape was the initial concept and private commitment, Pullman added. The architects subsequently designed the renovations for Berlin and Fingerprints as well. "Redevelopment can help be a springboard, but you need to then get the private sector to buy into it and I think in this case they have," he said.

In fact, nearly half of the 4th + Linden office units were already sold at full asking price before the near \$1 million project was even finished. Tenants taking occupancy include a web-hosting firm from El Segundo and an architectural engineering company based in San Francisco, and there are two units totaling more than

6,000 square feet still available. "There is a demand for this," Pullman said. "That's what we think is really exciting, because there are a lot of buildings that aren't being leveraged or utilized very well right now that can be upgraded and accommodate the creative class."

Creating Synergy

Another aspect is that specific spaces are left "raw," meaning interiors are left open to interpretation for an ongoing transformation. "I've never had the opportunity to start fresh," Kansteiner said. "This was just a raw space and it's been really exciting. You can define everything – the size of your kitchen, your bathroom, storage and where you want things to be. You have the space actually dictating things."

Kansteiner said it was the historic feel of the more than 1,000-square-foot section of building that made her think of the name Berlin. Although born in Germany, she said the name pays homage to how old buildings can be used for new purposes. "Beautiful brick walls and amazing ceilings make your space modern," she said. "I think that's what we've done."

Fingerprints, which has a larger space at about 5,000 square feet, has already held in-store concerts by Michael Franti, G. Love, Alexi Murdoch, The Dears and others, bringing out nearly 200 people to the store per show. Its old location was also a stopover for famous and up-and-coming musicians, but the new site is much larger and accommodates many more people. The new building holds a sense of "New York lofts, but still with a California feel to it," Foster said, which makes a perfect fit for selling used and new CDs and vinyl records.

The new vibe was exactly the goal of the project, he added. "Since we've been here and started this process, the neighborhood has been making tremendous changes," Foster said. "It's exactly the direction I was hoping it would go . . . Hopefully we end up being this little crazy funky enclave of interesting spots."

'Changing Perceptions'

Bohn and Pullman, known for their adaptive reuse work on the Courtyard Lofts on Pine Avenue, along with local developer and part investor Jan Van Dijs, known for renovating the Art Theatre on 4th Street's Retro Row, had planned to make the 4th + Linden project a model for future redevelopment in downtown.

Van Dijs, whose next project includes renovating the American Hotel at 224 E. Broadway, said the project is an example of how unique, small-scale projects can make a big impact on the public's opinion of certain "blighted" areas and the city as a whole. "What it has done is change people's perceptions about this area in a rather short period of time," said the developer.

With his own office at the front of the creative complex, Van Dijs said redeveloping a site thoughtfully and by considering the community – instead of tearing down historic buildings and replacing them with generic facilities – has both a positive social and business aspect. "It's just how people still perceive our city and a lot of that has to do with how we ripped out a lot of our history and our soul," he said. "We tried to replace it with stuff that's really not so nice. I think we have an opportunity here to save what's left and really try to make it great." ■

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(All photographs by the Business Journal's Thomas McConville)



More than 6,000 square feet of office space is available at the East Village Creative Offices, seen here on the left. The offices are part of a 20,000-square-foot adaptive reuse project that has recently revitalized the area at 4th Street and Linden Avenue in the East Village Arts District.



The East Village Creative Offices were designed with open spaces for natural lighting and accentuating the raw brick walls, seen here, to preserve the features of the historical building at 4th Street and Linden Avenue.



Lyons Art Supply has experienced more business after moving from its old location from across the street to be next to the East Village Creative Offices on 4th Street and Linden Avenue.



Jan Van Dijs, is a developer, contractor and investor, involved in several renovations and adaptive reuse projects in Long Beach and other cities. Van Dijs oversaw restoration of the Art Theatre on 4th Street, and developed the East Village Creative Offices.



Alan Pullman, AIA, senior principal, left, and Michael Bohn, AIA, principal, are architects for Studio One Eleven at Perkowitz+Ruth Architects based in Downtown Long Beach. Here they are seen in front of their adaptive reuse project 4th+Linden and East Village Creative Offices.