



The Monocle Guide to Building Better Cities



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2.
Pasona
Tokyo

On the 13th floor of its headquarters in central Tokyo, Pasona Group keeps pigs, cows, goats and silkie chickens. Raising livestock in an office building has helped to draw attention to the sharp decline in Japan's dairy farms: 10,510 at last count, just a 20th of the number four decades ago. Since planting a rice paddy in the basement of a Tokyo office tower in 2005, the Japanese recruitment firm has experimented with urban farming in the hope of getting young Japanese interested in agriculture.

It's an urgent task given that two-thirds of the country's 1.9 million farmers are 65 or older. Pasona now operates a small farm in western Japan for training programmes and business seminars, and places thousands of interns with family-run farms and agricultural co-operatives around the country. It's a model that's worthy of praise, a reminder for city-dwellers about the vital and often underappreciated role of food producers in the countryside.



3.
RDC-SIII
Long Beach, California

"Our mission is repairing cities and invigorating downtowns," says Michael Bohn, a senior principal at Studio One Eleven, an architecture, landscape and urban design firm. But its former office-tower HQ did little to reflect its values. So, in 2017, Studio One Eleven and partner firm Retail Design Collaborative (together RDC-SIII) turned a vacant department store into a new HQ.

While once struggling businesses have gained from the arrival of 130 employees, the headquarters' clever design – including offices that have been donated to local non-profits – has also precipitated foot traffic. The building's corners were earmarked for restaurants. Nearby, a former service dock has been turned into an urban garden and hosts community gatherings, while an indoor gallery space also draws the public.

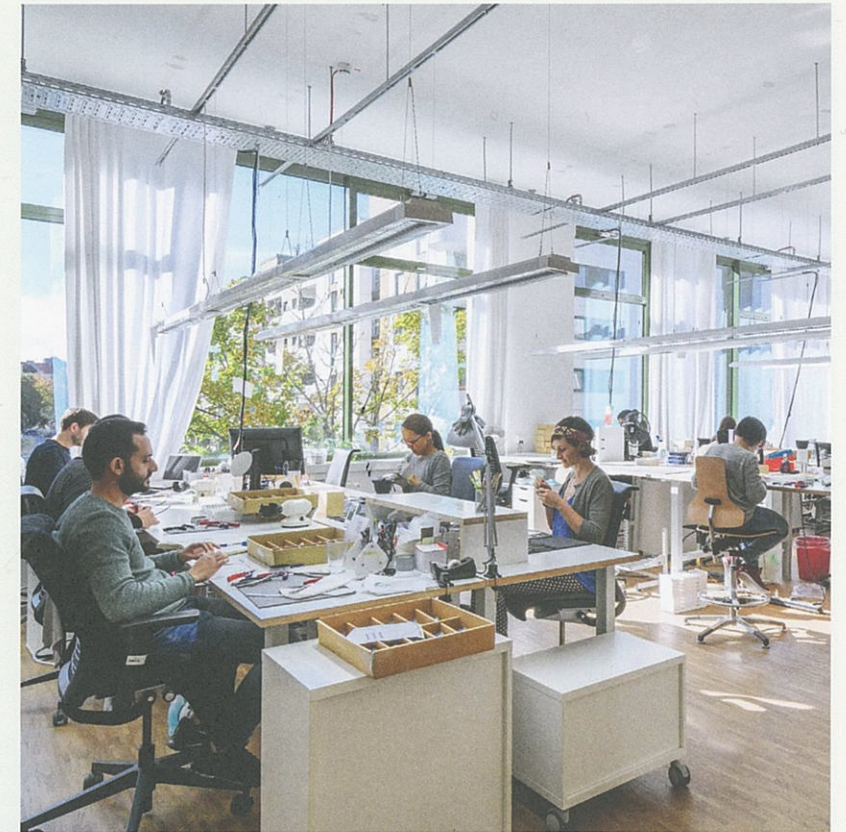
A flurry of new businesses has followed their move and, today, this once forgotten stretch of Long Beach has a new vibrancy at ground level.

4.
Mykita
Berlin

The Berlin-based eyewear brand Mykita defies the notion that manufacturing can only happen somewhere hours away from the city centre. Since the firm's inception, the company has kept all of its product making in the city core and it now generates more than €30m in annual revenue.

Moving from Mitte to Kreuzberg in 2014, the brand acquired a five-storey neoclassical building with a central courtyard and turned it into an HQ and factory known as Mykita Haus. It's home to 290 employees in more than 14 divisions and outputs 600 pairs of glasses a day. The company has also rented space to other fashion and design firms.

Companies such as this show how an HQ can be a place of making and how jobs in a city core can deliver easier lifestyles and more enjoyable commutes (perhaps even just a short walk). We need more businesses like Mykita – and less restrictive zoning laws too.



5.
Squire and Partners
London

Squire and Partners may be one of London's most prestigious architecture firms but its headquarters are in the energetic, socially diverse community of Brixton. While the inner-south-London district deals with the reality of gentrification, the practice has shown integration to be the smart option for arriving businesses.

Squire and Partners has implemented an "open doors" policy and filled the former department store with Brixton life. The public can enjoy a drink and dinner at the rooftop restaurant, while a basement event space has a lively calendar of free exhibitions.

By throwing open its doors, Squire and Partners is cementing the building's value within a community largely against gentrification. It's not easy being the new kid on the block but the firm hopes to provide a valuable community platform and to play its part in the ongoing story of this neighbourhood.