

INTERIOR DESIGN[®]

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out and about

mixed use, mixed media

text: edie cohen photography: john edward linden

A Los Angeles complex by Studio Pali Fekete Architects is a place to live, work, dine, and appreciate art





In Los Angeles, it's rare for architects to make a clean sweep: develop real estate, design, and build. Yet the Museum of Design Art & Architecture is the result of just such a coup by Zoltan Pali and Judit Méda Fekete, the gutsy couple who are principals of Studio Pali Fekete Architects. The ground-up two-story structure spins mixed-use in new directions while experimenting with a potentially lucrative business model. "I had always

Previous spread: In Los Angeles, Studio Pali Fekete Architects clad the Museum of Design Art & Architecture in cement-fiberboard panels that also screen sun and rain. A steel staircase with concrete treads leads to the four-bedroom loft of the firm's principals, Zoltan Pali and Judit Méda Fekete, as well as six other units.

Top: Part of the ground floor is the MODAA Gallery, currently featuring acrylics on canvas by Charles Arnoldi and stainless-steel "modern furniture" by Cheryl Ekstrom. *Center:* The sight line from the studio's custom walnut-veneered reception desk to Wilson restaurant is uninterrupted. *Bottom:* A photomural adapted from a 1920's image of cooks exercising spans the wall behind the restaurant's bamboo-plywood bar. Stools by Joan Casas i Úrtinez combine aluminum frames and polypropylene seats.

thought it would be nice to work, live, and eat in one place," Fekete says. "And to have a gallery."

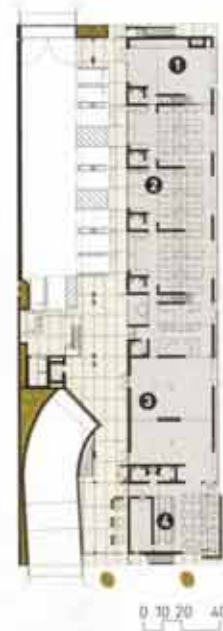
That pipe dream got closer to reality when she and Pali discovered a derelict nursery on a 1/2-acre plot in the heart of Culver City—an area burgeoning with galleries and restaurants. Thrilled at the prospect of relocating from the firm's lackluster digs nearby, Fekete needed just a two-day weekend to sketch out the 28,000-square-foot concept. (The permits and execution, however, took almost two years.)

Most of the ground floor is dedicated to SPF's studio and the MODAA Gallery. Fekete also envisioned a café occupying one end—and so did chef Michael Wilson, nephew of Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys and veteran of the Venice restaurant 5 Dudley: The result is the 1,500-square-foot Wilson restaurant. The building's upper level is dedicated to live-work lofts. The couple combined two of the 1,800-square-foot, double-height units for themselves, leaving six for sale.

Although MODAA is a basic wood-framed concrete box, its front and side exposures are a zig-zag of white, ocher, and gray panels of cement fiberboard. In addition to color, they vary in width (16, 32, and 48 inches) and in relief (16-



The 2,000-square-foot gallery, with its sealed unpolished concrete floor and 20-foot ceiling, doubles as a conference room and party space for SPF.A.



- 1 RECEPTION
- 2 STUDIO
- 3 GALLERY
- 4 RESTAURANT



inches, 8 inches, and flush), creating a lively rhythm. "It's like sheet music," Pali says. At night, a colored LED sequence transforms the street elevation into what Fekete calls "structural artwork."

Aesthetics aren't the treatment's only asset. The facade is eco-friendly, too, with the panels sheltering the building from sun and rain as well as providing an acoustical barrier from traffic noise. Meanwhile, on the cedar-screened rear facade, the courtyard's three double doors offer passive ventilation—they're almost always open. (This is L.A., after all.)

Opposite: The firm's staff of 30 sits at custom workstations in walnut veneer and steel. Above them hangs an enlarged photograph of a 2005 residential project in Los Angeles.

Top: The administrative office, library, and graphics department occupy the mezzanine. **Bottom:** Pali and Fekete furnished reception with Marcel Breuer's Wassily chairs, Marcel Wanders's Botani sofa, and a Greek wool shag rug. The glass-fronted conference room is the studio's only enclosure.

The ground-floor interiors comprise three distinct components, but they're still of a piece. Flooring throughout is sealed unpolished concrete. Walls are all white. Ceilings are 20 feet high. "I had to think like a developer," Pali explains. "By keeping the space flexible, we could rent it out should we need to downsize." Because there's an almost boundary-free flow between studio, gallery, and restaurant, SPF-A staffers en route to a quick bite to eat at Wilson can draw inspiration from the painting and sculpture shown in the gallery—which doubles as a meeting room to impress art-sensitive clients, both current and potential. For example, it was here that the firm recently hosted a two-day meeting with clients from a performing-arts center in L.A.

There's a more conventional glass-fronted conference room in the studio, but Pali and Fekete left the rest of it open. Staff and principals alike occupy rows of custom workstations built of walnut veneer and steel; cabinetry is walnut-veneered, too. Overhead, metal-halide fixtures offer



ambient light to supplement the plentiful sunshine. A mezzanine houses the library, graphics department, and administrative staff.

The squared-off forms of charcoal-gray and red wool-covered sofas and chairs by Marcel Wanders appear first in reception, then in the living area of Pali and Fekete's apartment—where they retreat at the end of the workday by way of a staircase or an elevator, both installed outside to increase rentable area. True to the loft vernacular, the four-bedroom duplex provides plenty of unobstructed space for the couple to

Top: Millwork veneered in rift-cut white oak defines the master suite in the couple's loft. The leather-wrapped bed is by Abad Diseño Design Group. Chris Collard designed the planter in nickel and fiberglass. **Center:** Exposed structural elements include the steel beam supporting the loft's mezzanine playroom, reached via maple stairs. **Bottom:** A colored LED sequence illuminates the street-front elevation.

Opposite: The seven live-work lofts open to a cedar-trellised breezeway one floor up.

share with their rambunctious sons, ages 10 and 11. "We kept materiality down," Pali says. Flooring is the same unpolished concrete as below. Millwork veneered in rift-cut white oak characterizes the master bedroom and the kitchen. The stair to the mezzanine playroom has maple treads and a balustrade of stainless-steel cables. Steel beams, ductwork, and ceiling joists are all exposed.

Cedar trellises shelter the second-floor breezeway, shared by all seven lofts. So make that "develop, design, and build"—then create an all-inclusive community. Prius not required. ➤

PROJECT TEAM: GREGORY STUTHEIT.

PANELS (EXTERIOR): AMERICAN FIBER CEMENT CORPORATION. BAR SURFACING (RESTAURANT): SMITH & FONG COMPANY. TABLETOP MATERIAL (RESTAURANT), COUNTER MATERIAL (KITCHEN): CAESAR-STONE. STOOLS (RESTAURANT), SOFA (RECEPTION), BED, PLANTER (BEDROOM), SEATING (LIVING AREA, KITCHEN): DESIGN WITHIN REACH. TRACK LIGHTING (GALLERY, LIVING AREA): ELLIPTIPAR. SCENES (STUDIO): LSI INDUSTRIES. FLUORESCENT FIXTURES: DELRAY LIGHTING. CHAIRS: HERMAN MILLER. CHAIRS (RECEPTION): KNOLL. COFFEE TABLES (RECEPTION, LIVING AREA), LAMP (LIVING AREA): THROUGH LINEA. DOORS (CONFERENCE ROOM): FLEETWOOD WINDOWS & DOORS. FLOODLIGHTS (FACADE): GEN-LYTE GROUP. LED FIXTURES: COLOR KINETICS. WALL FIXTURES (BREEZEWAY): PACE ILLUMINATION CORP. STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: JOHN LABIB & ASSOCIATES. MECHANICAL, PLUMBING ENGINEER: L&O ENGINEERING.

