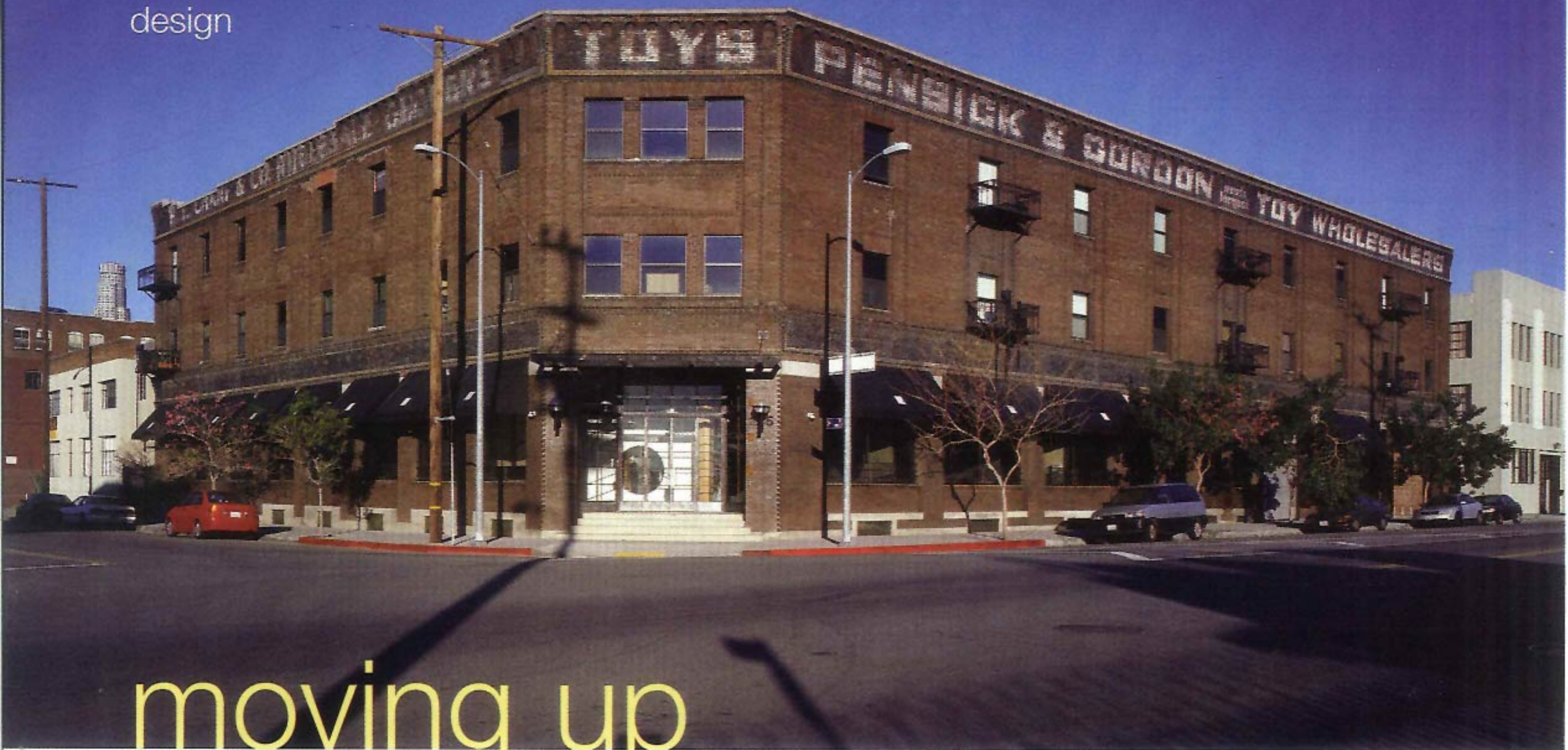


design



moving up in downtown

Environetics melds modern commercial and residential options with the original 1920s character of an historic toy warehouse to help revitalize Los Angeles' Artist District

By Katie Weeks
Photography by Jay Valenzia

While the worn signage near the brick roofline of the building at 225 Santa Fe Ave. in downtown Los Angeles may advertise the three-story structure as a toy wholesaler, a glimpse through the large circular entryway window shows that the business inside is hardly child's play. Built in the 1920s, the warehouse has since traded in Tinkertoys and Legos for fashion-forward retail tenants and loft condominiums, thanks to Los Angeles-based architectural firm Environetics.

In updating the structure, which is part of downtown Los Angeles' Artist District, owner Lawrence Grassini sought to give the space a modern feel without compromising the building's traditional character. "For L.A., this is an historically significant building. While it may not be significant in terms of its use, it's one of the few buildings that remains here from the 1920s," notes Richard Lehman, director of design at Environetics. "We wanted to keep the character of the building's time period as much as possible." It was also a fortuitous design goal as a previously completed seismic upgrade limited changes to the building's exterior.

Embracing the building's past, Environetics retained the original toy warehouse signage near the roof. During the seismic upgrade, large warehouse doors had been replaced with glass panels, to which Environetics then added awnings to alleviate heat and decrease energy consumption. To make the building more accessible, the team also added a steel I-beam canopy with LED lighting that cycles through a rainbow of color over a timed interval. "Downtown L.A. can be a scary place to a lot of people. Adding the lighting changed the character of the building. The colors warm up the area," explains Lehman. Adds Corinne Grassini, principal designer and president of The Society for Rational Dress, the

The exterior of 225 Santa Fe Ave. (above) may have retained its 1920s style, but the interiors for The Society of Rational Dress on the ground floor (opposite) is decidedly 21st Century.



ground floor's main tenant, "Some of the old toy lofts look so industrial, huge, and uninviting, but altering the exterior to make it a little lighter makes it look more accessible."

In outfitting the interiors, another challenge arose: The top two floors housed 20 residential condominiums that already were occupied when Grassini began transforming the ground floor to house commercial ventures. While local code requirements mandated a 5/8-in. dry wall layer between floors for fire separation, it was not enough to affect sound attenuation, which was a prime concern for the mixed-use project. Simply adding extra dry wall, however, was not an option as additional materials would have comprised the ground floor's design aesthetic, which included leaving the ceilings and mechanical systems exposed in reference to the building's warehouse past. After some research and experi-

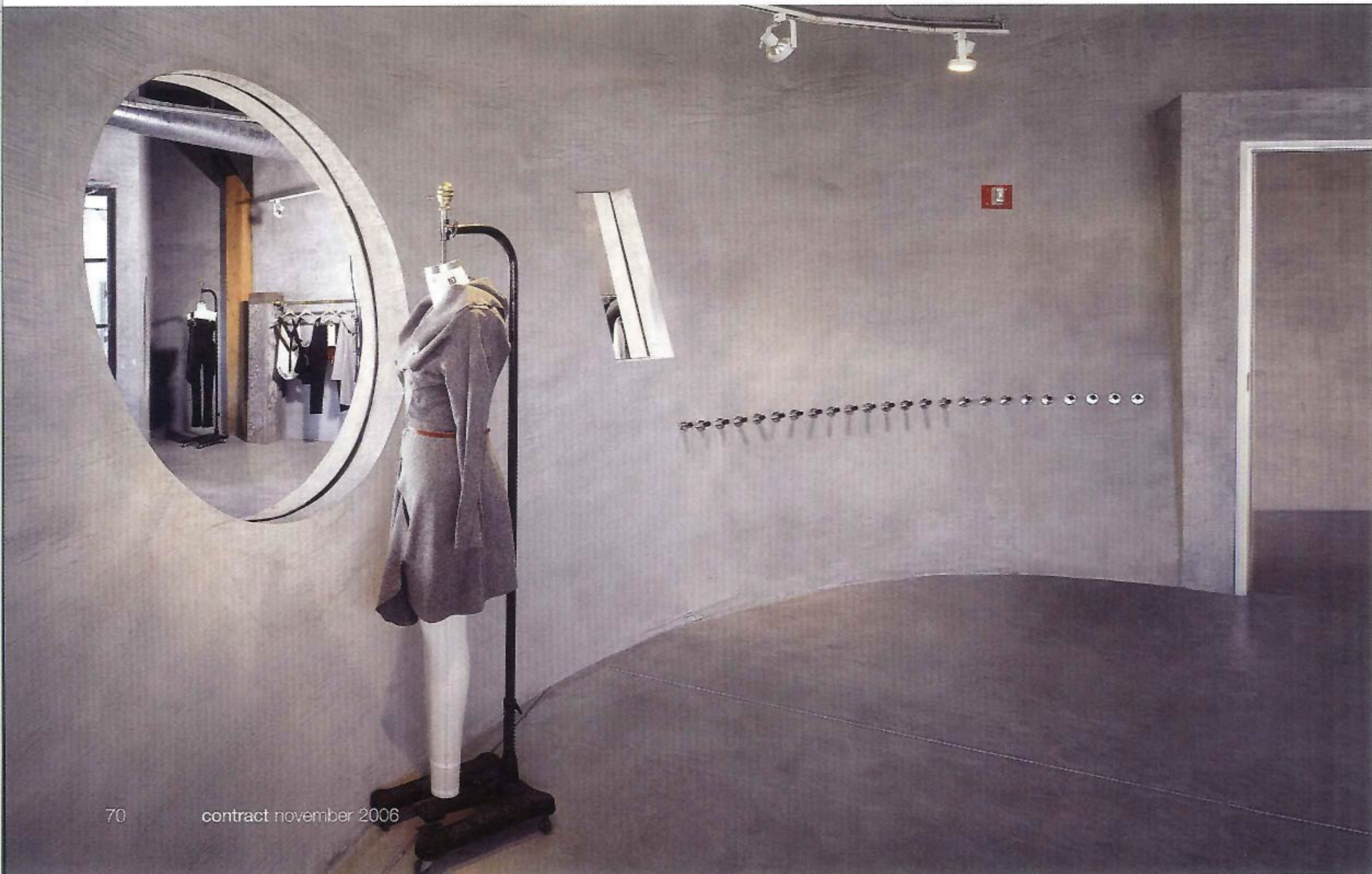
menting, the design team outfitted the space with a combination of new material by Quiet Solutions, dry wall, and other custom pieces. Although it ended up costing 10 times more than regular dry wall, it solved a number of problems and preserved the rough, industrial aesthetic Grassini sought to create in the showroom/studio space for the Society for Rational Dress.

Throughout the ground floor, Environetics played off of original elements including an abundance of concrete and raw wood beams. The team sealed the concrete floor, applied concrete plaster to the walls, and kept the building's original columns when possible. Odd-shaped concrete blocks left in the parking structure were cleaned and re-fashioned into furniture, and new steel-framed glass doors and windows were left out to rust before installation to better capture the industrial aesthetic. Adding a modern twist, Environetics

enclosed Grassini's office space in a large cone that features a round window overlooking the reception area and main glass-wall entry.

"People are always really surprised by the cone-shaped office," Grassini admits. "We thought that juxtaposing the old architecture of the building with a shape that's a bit more futuristic would be interesting. But the concrete finish still helps it look very raw and original." It also provides an intriguing background for Grassini's delicate and tailored clothing. What's more, Lehman says, it creates an overall mystique that draws in passersby. "When you look in the window, walk into the space, see that the inside has this cone shape, and then look through these beautiful steel and glass doors, you feel excited," he says. "It's like it's something you've never seen before." ■

The sloping walls of a cone-shaped room (below) separate studio space from the reception and showcase areas at the front of the building's main retail tenant, The Society for Rational Dress. Throughout the ground floor's interior space (opposite), the combination of exposed ceilings, the original concrete floors, and concrete plaster references the warehouse's past.





who

Project: Santa Fe Street Project. *Client:* Lawrence Grassini. *Architect, interior designer, construction manager, lighting designer:* Environetics; Sandra Dino, LEED AP; Richard Lehman, director of design, principal in charge; Richard Korchien, AIA. *Structural engineer:* Insight Structural Engineers. *Mechanical/electrical engineer:* Simon Wong and Associates. *General contractor:* Sierra Pacific Constructors. *Security consultant:* JDC Security. *Acoustician:* Martin Newson. *Photographer:* Jay Venezia.

what

Wallcoverings: Steel Troweled Portland Cement. *Paint:* Dunn Edwards. *Laminates, veneers:* Stainless steel. *Dry wall:* USG. *Masonry:* Tony Servera Co. *Flooring:* Renegade Flooring. *Carpet backing:* Quiet Solutions, Quiet Rock. *Ceiling:* Exposed Beams. *Lighting:* Lightloier, Artemide. *Glass:* Coordinated Glass Systems. *Window frames, doors:* Torrance Steel & Window Company. *Window treatments:* Knoll Textiles. *Door hardware:* Schlage, Ives, LCN, Pemko. *Railing:* RSR Steel Fabrication. *Seating, tables:* Custom. *Architectural woodworking/ cabinetmaking:* Arandas Woodcraft. *Planters, accessories:* Quick Crete Products Corp. *Signage:* ABC Letter Art. *Landscaping:* Natural Selections Landscaping. *Plumbing fixtures:* Dornbracht, Kohler.

where

Location: Los Angeles, CA. *Total floor area:* 17,000 sq. ft. *No. of floors:* 1. *Cost/sq. ft.:* \$71.

