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Environetics Blends 1920s Warehouse Style with Goth Interior Design to Create Innovative Women’s Clothing Design Studio

First floor of old toy warehouse in Los Angeles’ Artist District designed for commercial enterprises while meeting upper level condominium owners’ needs for quiet.

LOS ANGELES, Calif., April 11, 2006 – Downtown Los Angeles, like many urban centers throughout the United States, is undergoing a revitalization, especially in the vicinity that has come to be known as the Artist District. When prominent attorney Lawrence Grassini purchased a 1920s building, which had once been a toy warehouse, he called on long-time partner Environetics to meet the challenges presented in melding commercial and residential areas and historic architecture with “Goth” inspired design.

“This project typifies our commitment to clearly understanding our client’s vision and intent. In this case, the owner wanted to improve the building in a way that satisfied his tenants, his neighbors, and his own business needs,” said Richard Lehman, EVP Director of Design at Environetics. “Not only were pride and property value important, but the quality of the work and style of design factored in as critical design elements.”

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Tradition

Located at 255 South Santa Fe in Los Angeles, the project includes approximately 20,000 sf of space in a three-story brick warehouse building built in the 1920s. The building is surrounded by restaurants, new condominiums and the Southern California Institute of Architecture, which is located directly across the street. The owner had at first wanted to add windows and doorways; however, due to the recent completion of seismic upgrades, the exterior shell could not be altered. The goal was to keep the exterior of the building in tune with the period it reflected.

In order to preserve the building's historical character, Environetics opted to retain the original toy warehouse sign painted at the top of the building. Large openings that had once been warehouse doors and are now existing windows were treated with awnings to alleviate the heat and decrease energy consumption associated with the south and west facing windows. A steel I-beam canopy was added to the front of the building and exterior lighting was upgraded and expanded. These changes not only supported the integrity of the design, but added a quality that elevated it from warehouse status to the style of an upscale condominium.

Goth Style

The primary tenant for the new space was a women's clothing designer who wanted a studio inspired by her affinity toward "Goth" art, design and music. In reviewing her vision for the project, she indicated a desire to integrate existing features and use a significant amount of concrete to emphasize the Goth style. As a result, the original concrete floor was kept natural and sealed, concrete plaster was applied to the walls and sealed without paint, and wherever possible Environetics utilized natural materials such as glass, wood and steel.

To extend this look and feel, the old columns of the building were kept and only replaced sparingly with steel I-beams. Concrete blocks of odd shapes and sizes that had been left in the parking structure were cleaned and re-fashioned into furniture.

The original building had solid raw wood beams that were spaced every 12 to 16 feet and anchored by steel braces to the wood ceiling beams for support; these elements remain as key features of the new space. In addition, despite having to completely rebuild the ceiling for sound attenuation, Environetics kept the steel I-beams, pipes and conduits as aspects of the Goth and Industrial motif.

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The firm created a cone-shaped office for the tenant featuring a round window overlooking the reception area and main glass-wall entry. The workspace is lit by low-voltage, stem-mounted lighting which hangs from the 15-foot ceiling, and can be adjusted for use in any type of work or display setting.

“Frank Lloyd Wright said that if you design with a style in mind, you are not designing, just decorating, but if you design with a client in mind, an idea in mind, that’s design and that’s when you come up with something unique,” Lehman added. “When you look in the window and walk into this space and see that the inside has this cone shape and then look through these beautiful steel and glass doors, you feel excited – like it is something you’ve never seen before.”

Residential

The upper two stories of the building were converted into 20 loft condominium units, many of them two levels, all designed in a contemporary style with hardwood floors. A portion of the center area of the building ceiling and the second floor were cut away to allow light to penetrate the interiors of the condominiums. Steel grate walkways and wire railings provide circulation space between the floors. When the project began, all of the condominium units were occupied.

The most significant challenge with the project involved the blending of residential and commercial space, specifically in terms of sound attenuation. During the restoration by previous owners, city codes for sound were met; however, padding was not included in the flooring which created an untenable situation for the residents. Even a whisper below could be heard in the living quarters above.

Environetics conducted research and located an innovative material that promised to meet codes as well as the tenant sound requirements at a substantially lower cost than traditional solutions. Using a combination of the new material by Quite Solutions, drywall, and other customary solutions, Environetics achieved a level of sound attenuation that satisfied residents and allowed the development to proceed as planned.

Project Facts

Owned or Rented:	Owned
Type/Function of Space:	Design studio, food facility, commercial business
Square Footage/Floors:	1 Floor – 17,000 sf
Number of People:	Approximately 15
Principal in charge:	Richard Lehman
Designer:	Sandra Dino

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Scope of Services:	Concept planning, space planning, design development, historical preservation, construction documentation, project management, homeowners association liaison
Approximate Cost:	\$600,000 plus \$200,000 electrical upgrade
Furniture Cost:	N/A
Contractors/Suppliers/Sources:	Sierra Pacific Constructors Torrance Steel Window Company, Van Nuys Awning, Pace Illuminations Corporation

About Environetics

Environetics is a full-service interior architectural design and space-planning firm that specializes in creating unique work environments that improve employee productivity and enhance brand image. Environetics' diverse staff consists of space planners, architects, interior designers, graphic and industrial designers, estimators and CAD drafters, all collaborating to identify client space needs and deliver interior plans for maximum effectiveness, efficiency and design.