



## Review: Architecture firms convert SoFlo site from rust to green

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Stop! Why throw away that perfectly good old junk when you could turn it into a neat new architecture studio?

Two San Antonio firms collaborated on just such a transformation of a ramshackle industrial complex on South Flores Street — the chic-ifying SoFlo area, as it's sometimes called.

Mark Oppelt, a partner in O'Neill Conrad Oppelt Architects, came across the property a couple of years ago, when it was put up for sale after outlasting its former use by a manufacturer of tractor trailers.

The two major buildings were bare-bones industrial sheds — one clad in weathered corrugated metal, the other fitted with garage doors on its long north and south faces.

OCO thought of renovating one building for itself and the other for lease, but lenders said no.

Solution: Seven partners from OCO and Alamo Architects formed a limited partnership, dubbed Magnificent So-Flo Seven, to develop the property and lease it back to the respective firms. Each firm designed the renovation of the building it would occupy, but the firms collaborated in the overall package.

Environmentally friendly thinking pervades the design, and the developers have registered the project with the U.S. Green Building Council for certification under its Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design rating system.

The green aspects of the design partly relate to the reuse of old materials in resourceful and sometimes witty ways.

The site's old concrete paving was broken into large, roughly rectangular sections, which were stood on end to form a rustic garden wall. The reuse saved landfill space and created one of the project's most widely appreciated design features.

Some of the site's assorted rusting metal parts — surplus steel beams, garage-door panels, roof vents, you name it — were reassembled into pedestrian gateways from the streets and the rear parking lot.

These gateways are similar in look and spirit to the improvisations from salvaged parts one sees in many San

### Convention at a glance

- What:** AIA 150: 'Growing Beyond Green.' The American Institute of Architects' 2007 national convention and design exposition is expected to draw 20,000 architects and design professionals to San Antonio.
- When:** Preconvention classes and tours begin Wednesday; convention Thursday through Saturday
- Where:** Convention Center
- Note:** Convention is closed to the

Antonio neighborhoods where trade skills are still practiced.

Somewhat fanciful but not parodistic, these gateways can be interpreted as professional architecture's homage to its folk counterpart.

Alamo Architects used some the wooden garage-door panels from its building as desk-height partitions on work stations. Industrial sash from the shed roof became railings for the firm's mezzanine and stairway.

The buildings themselves retained their industrial character in the renovations. Both firms kept — and left exposed — the steel frames and concrete floors of their buildings.

OCO resheathed its building in new corrugated metal and replaced the original industrial sash with modern window systems. New windows, with projecting sun shades, were inserted in the formerly blank west facade.

Alamo Architects walled in the former garage openings on the south facade with corrugated metal, but included a band of high windows. The openings in the north facade were fully glazed, providing a view of the garden.

Both spaces are flooded with natural light during the day, limiting the need for electrical lighting. Operable windows reduce the need for mechanical heating and cooling, at least in theory.

On the South Flores frontage of the Alamo Architects building, a one-story addition of red structural clay tile was cleaned up and fitted with new canopies over the windows, but not much repair was required. Most of the steel windows are original; others were replaced with custom-made duplicates.

OCO built a narrow storage mezzanine that runs lengthwise under the pitch of the shed roof and breaks the interior space into relatively intimate bands. OCO's only partitions, apart from work stations, are those that separate a conference room and reception area from the studio. The bold red and orange colors of those partitions mimic the oxidation colors of the steel structure.

A notch was cut out of each building at the corner where they previously met, to allow passage across the site and create covered entries for both firms.

With their doorways in such neighborly proximity, one can imagine architects dashing across the way to borrow a cup of marking pens.

Green, of course.

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Online at: <http://www.mysanantonio.com/entertainment/stories/MYSA050207.4P.AIA.green.rev.1626c72.html>

public with the exception of the AIA's 'America's Favorite Architecture' exhibit, a display of the top 150 buildings, bridges, memorials and ballparks in America.

•Web site: [aiaconvention.com](http://aiaconvention.com)



[Complete coverage of the national convention of the American Institute of Architects](#)