

# Alley Adaptation



To some, simplifying means downsizing. But for San Francisco designer/builder Loring Sagan, it means combining his professional and personal lives into one cavernous building. He runs his varied business ventures—an architecture firm, a real estate redevelopment company, and a pottery studio—out of a 6,000-square-foot former bakery. It's an industrial space lined with desks and lit by a large skylight,



but built into the soaring atrium is a pied-à-terre whose kitchen/dining area doubles as an office conference room. "My wife and I don't live in the apartment full time, but I take a nap here almost every day," Sagan says. ■ After 20 years of building resort homes in Tahoe City, Calif., Sagan had begun searching for work space in San Francisco's Hayes Valley neighborhood, a once-seedy district on its way to becoming the cultural corridor it is today. The grungy building, 120 feet long by 27 feet wide, started life as a bakery in the 1920s and later served as a photography studio. But when Sagan purchased it eight years ago, it was part of a funky alleyway with a porn club next door. ■ "It was a



The new third-story mezzanine holds a kitchen/conference room at the top of the stairs. Across the long bridge is Sagan's living/sleeping studio, where a bath and closet are tucked behind the white wall. Sliding sandblasted glass doors borrow atrium light and views.

rabbit warren of small rooms with illegal squatters here and there," Sagan says. Working with an outside construction manager, he gutted it and sandblasted the concrete side walls. Next he inserted a steel moment frame, hoisted by crane over two neighboring buildings, and installed three concrete wing walls, roughly 1 foot thick and 8 feet long, to give the building horizontal stability. The out-of-level timber floors also were dismantled and reframed, then poured with radiant-heated concrete. ■ A new third story blurs the edges between public and private zones. The open-plan second level houses Sagan's two companies—Sagan Piechota Architecture and Buildinc.—plus another architecture firm. His apartment occupies a bumped-up mezzanine that's essentially two rooms on opposite ends of the long building, connected by a bridge through the atrium. Up a flight of stairs from the offices, the open-to-below kitchen has a commodious table that works as well for business meetings as it does for entertaining. ■ Across the bridge,

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an oversize walnut door opens to a bedroom/living room and bath. "Crossing the bridge through the atrium is a metaphorical departure from work," Sagan says. Sliding frosted-glass walls close off the living area from the atrium below. "If we're there alone at night we open them up and borrow space from the atrium," he says. "When they're closed, everything is quiet." ■ The once-derelict real estate now attracts vibrant commercial tenants, too. The ground-level is leased to Blue Bottle Coffee, a nationally known coffee roaster, and Fatted Calf, an artisanal charcuterie. And the wood and metal workshop Sagan set up to build out the finishes has since been turned into his pottery studio. ■ Not only is the building a model for combining public and private space, it also demonstrates how public/private partnerships can transform the public realm. Sagan just finished landscaping a 200-foot section of the alleyway



**The kitchen/conference room opens to an outdoor terrace, as does the studio across the atrium. Ground-level garage doors lift up, creating inviting sidewalk space for the Blue Bottle Coffee kiosk. The new ipe and glass façade updates the streetscape.**

with gardens and benches, using a \$98,500 grant from the city. It builds on the neighborhood renaissance begun 10 years ago, when an earthquake-damaged freeway was torn down. "The end of my alley is a park," Sagan says. "You wouldn't recognize the neighborhood now." ■

**Project Credits:** Builders: Loring Sagan, San Francisco; Paul Woo Construction, San Francisco; Designer: Sagan Piechota Architecture, San Francisco; Landscape designer: Sagan Piechota Architecture; Living space: 6,000 square feet (apartment: 600 square feet); Site: 0.07 acre; Cost: \$250 per square foot; Photographer: Sharon Risedorph. / Resources: Dishwasher: Fisher & Paykel; Entry door: Stuart Wright and Tom Allen; Garage doors: Schweiss; Kitchen and bath fixtures and fittings: Hansgrohe; Solar energy system: SunPower Corp.