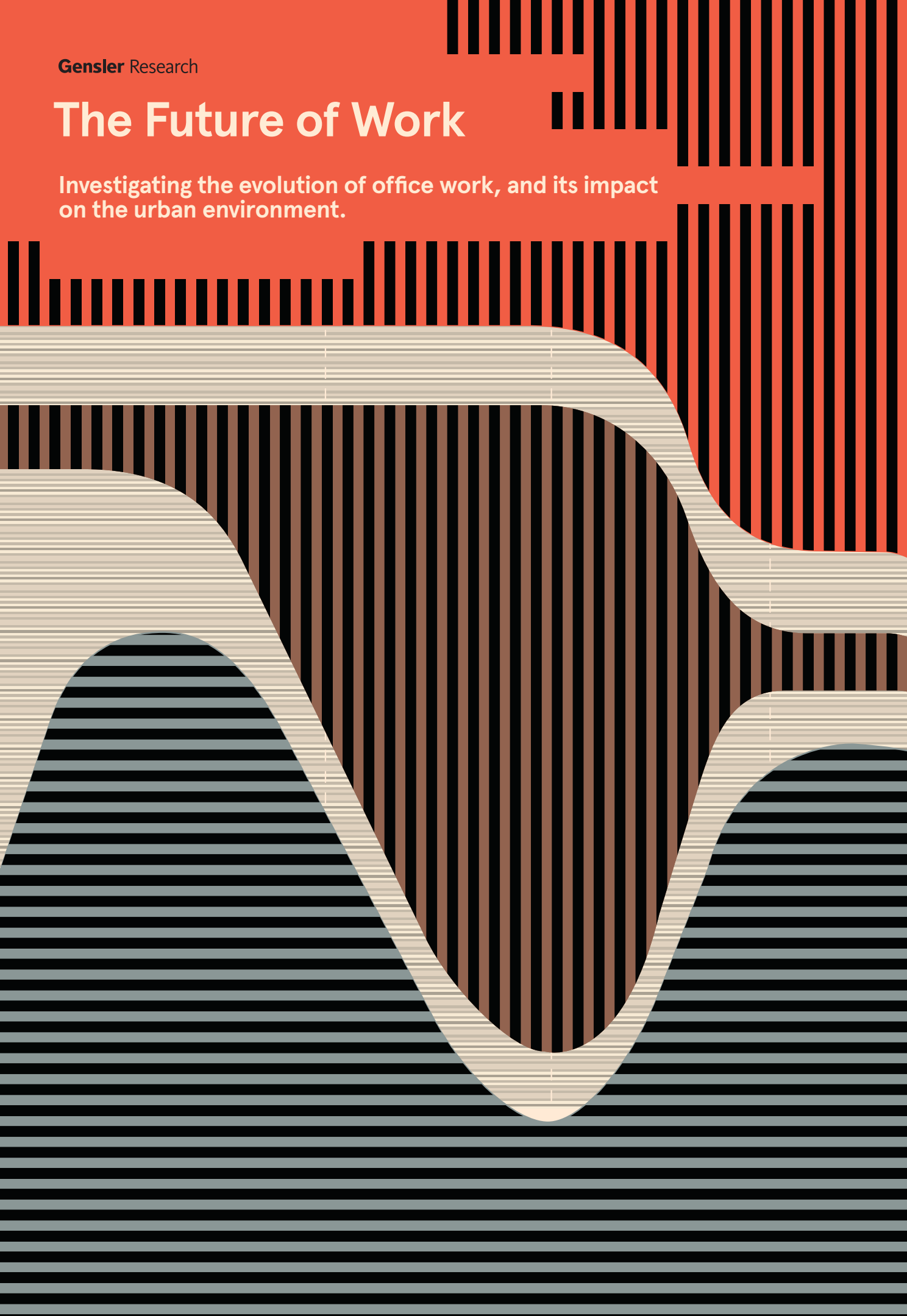


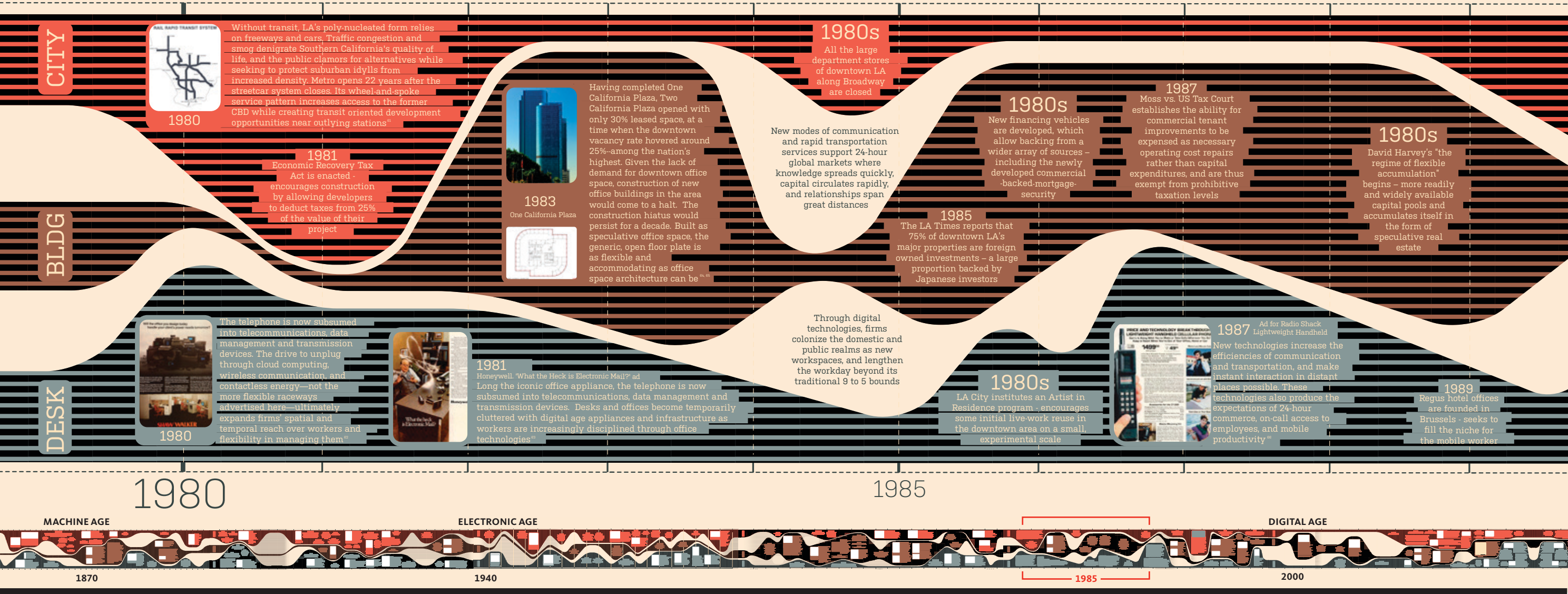
The Future of Work

Investigating the evolution of office work, and its impact on the urban environment.



City / Building / Desk

What might the future of work look like and how could this reshape our cities?



WHAT WE DID

We conducted a three-year research project with the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) think-tank cityLAB to investigate the future of office work, and its impact on the urban environment, using Los Angeles as a case study. At the onset of our research, we asked: Is the generic office building still relevant? Does Rem Koolhaas's 1993 "Typical Plan" still apply to today's world of work? If not, what is the future of this building type? And, because these buildings take up so much of the real estate in our cities, what would the urban impact be if their DNA were to change?

To investigate these questions, our multiyear project explored the nature of "work" and the spaces it inhabits through three sequential processes: Research, Formulation, and Design.

We researched the history and trajectory of office buildings and forms of 21st-century work to both challenge well-established narratives about urban centers and propose new ways to think about time, location, and the organization of work. Our research included published third-party studies, roundtable discussions with urban planning and workplace experts, and the development of models that proposed new strategies for office design as it relates to urban planning.

The outcomes highlight emerging ecologies and economies of work in Los Angeles with the power to transform how we address challenges presented by the central business district, urban land use, office buildings, desk configurations, and the spaces of everyday life on a broader scale.

THE CONTEXT

The notion of work has been historically structured around three distinct scales: the desk, the building, and the city. At the desk scale, work life has undergone a process of perpetual change due to innovations in technology, efficiency, and communication that continually challenge the way we consider and define a work "environment." At the scale of buildings and cities, new patterns of work are allowing—or in many cases, forcing—workers' lives to be entirely restructured. However, with instantaneous forms of communication and rapid flows of information, the physical dimensions that have historically bound each worker—the cubicle, building floor plate, or city district, for example—have become increasingly difficult to characterize.

The old binary oppositions of home and office, public and private, downtown and suburb, interior architecture and building design, now fail to describe the current world of work. The distinctions of the desk, the building, and the city—as they pertain to work—are inadequate. Los Angeles proves an excellent case study here, as the oldest post-war American city, and as such the model for many American cities. Like most American cities, Los Angeles' urban core was historically a place for industry, commerce, and work. When urban sprawl pushed the city boundaries outward and established many suburbs in the mid-20th century, Downtown Los Angeles retreated, losing much of its population, businesses, and vibrancy. Today, Downtown Los Angeles is experiencing a renaissance as a district that is rooted in work. How it continues to support businesses, workers, and visitors will be key to its resilience.

THE RESULTS: YEAR ONE

Our first year of research explored the history of Downtown Los Angeles within a broader genealogy of city planning, office building design, and technology. The re-emergence of Downtown Los Angeles challenges the definition of urban centers elsewhere; it serves as one potential location for work in the city among many. Technology has allowed modern knowledge workers to be more mobile, allowing the office and its typical interior to encroach on the airport, café, public park, plaza, automobile, and most notably, the home.

Our findings from year one charted the evolution of work activity in Los Angeles by rethinking the concept of a central business district in scalar, material terms: “city,” “building,” and “desk.” They are outlined in the first publication in our series, *The Future of Office Work, Vol. 1: How We Got Here*.



WHAT THIS MEANS

Given Los Angeles’ decentralized nature, it serves as an excellent case study for work that permeates beyond the downtown setting. The history of Downtown Los Angeles is a narrative of perpetual revisionism. It has been able to morph in ways more consistent with 21st-century forms of work, and as such is a lesson for other cities with similar struggles. As we chart this evolution, the existing scales of work are becoming less distinct, overlapping and intermingling instead.

THE RESULTS: YEAR TWO

Our second year of research focused on the conceptual and physical gaps within office design. How might traditional places for work be re-formulated? How might new professional alliances be forged to improve how we work, whether between urban planning and industrial design, or mobile technology and architecture? We investigated these questions via a series of roundtable discussions and panel presentations, during which leading academics and professionals proposed sites in Los Angeles that are most ripe for rethinking.

We organized the content from these discussions into a four-part publication, *-Less: Re-wiring Work*, the second volume of *The Future of Office Work* series. In this volume, we explore moving design and professional boundaries beyond the confines of the desk, building, and city to ultimately render work and the contemporary worker location-less.



WHAT THIS MEANS

Technology and the mobile worker are dissolving the traditional definitions of the workplace. The modern knowledge worker requires both mobility and some version of a home base, presenting challenges to consider for architectural and urban design applications. This dynamic workforce challenges the way we think about office design and office culture. Via this phase of work, we seek to raise the question: What would “location-less” work mean for the design and material form of a 21st-century downtown?

THE RESULTS: YEAR THREE

The conclusion of our three-year research collaboration offered paradigmatic future scenarios that re-conceptualize and critique the existing structures, locations, and boundaries of work within Los Angeles. We engaged industry and academic leaders from a multitude of fields, from real estate to mobility design, along with a group of graduate urban planning and architecture students at UCLA. Through a series of cityLAB and Gensler-led workshops, they collectively developed, designed, and tested new ideas. We then curated the three-year compilation of work—including books, pamphlets, posters, and videos—into a weeklong exhibition at the Architecture + Design Museum in Downtown Los Angeles. This event drew together LA city planners, architects, developers, and academics, and spurred new conversations about the potential futures of Los Angeles.



WHAT THIS MEANS

The city must reposition itself to accommodate and perpetuate the emerging ecologies of the workplace. The physical workplace holds a significant stake in the real estate market; it is imperative not only to be aware of the increasingly rapid change in the specific ways work is done, but also to harness the opportunity for change in the city as a whole—whether that is something as simple as adding electrical outlets by public benches, or as complex as rethinking transportation infrastructure.

WHAT'S NEXT

The collaboration with UCLA’s cityLAB allowed the gap between academia and practice to dissolve by tapping into minds in design and related industries, and by providing a tangible context for academic theory. The process synthesized history and critical analysis with the realities of practice, such as building and city codes, legislation, and finance, adding another dimension of inquiry outside the boundaries of pragmatism, while simultaneously providing a foundation for more informed speculation. We continue to work with the City of Los Angeles to blur the boundaries between academia and practice, between space and the city.

“In this situation, public space ceases to exist. It appears as a ‘sea’ of possible meetings or—articulated by confessions, sermons, advertisements, reading voices—a continuum of ‘interiors.’ The world appears as one interior, as a fluid of information.”

– “The Continuous Interior,” Winy Maas, *FARMAX: Excursions on Density*



Future of Work Exhibit, A+D Architecture and Design Museum, Los Angeles, CA

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Future Rail Transit Network, LACTC Annual Report (1983), page 2

Honeywell ad (1981), page 2

Shaw Walker ad (1980), page 2

MPG Office Trust, One California Plaza (image), page 2

MPG Office Trust, One California Plaza (plan), page 2

Radio Shack ad (1987), 213

My Linh Truong, page 6

About Gensler

As architects, designers, planners, and consultants, we partner with our clients on some 3,000 projects every year. These projects can be as small as a wine label or as large as a new urban district. With more than 5,000 professionals networked across 46 locations, we serve our clients as trusted advisors, combining localized expertise with global perspective wherever new opportunities arise. Our work reflects an enduring commitment to sustainability and the belief that design is one of the most powerful strategic tools for securing lasting competitive advantage.

Gensler's Research Program supports research investigations important to our firm, our clients, and to the ongoing learning and development of Gensler professionals. Research projects are practitioner-led with involvement across the globe. Our teams bring thought leadership to the table as we seek to solve our clients' and the world's most pressing challenges by creating high-performance solutions that embrace the business and world context in which we work, enhance the human experience, and deliver game-changing innovation.

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