

# DE-PAVING

## Shift Design Studio

Converting excess areas of pavement to gardens in San Francisco's extra-wide sidewalks radically changes the way they are perceived and function. Redefining these public spaces as places to linger and enjoy instead of merely pass through requires a recalibration that invites social interactions.

Where concrete to garden conversions occur, the context is immediately and permanently altered. Physical benefits range from stormwater diversion to beautification. Socially, whether done as an individual property or a collection of neighboring frontages, these projects provide passive access to nature, express a personality and aesthetic, and demonstrate a level of engagement and care for the area. Native and climate adapted (drought tolerant) plants reflect the specificity of each garden's micro-climate, often contributing to forage and habitat for birds, butterflies and pollinators. Certain locations may also provide for growing food and/or harvesting rainwater. An inherent factor of the work is to bring people together through a medium that transcends economic class, race, language and age.

The premise of this project questions what else can be done with our public areas other than paving it in a gesture of a lowest common denominator landscape. Engaging city government and re-writing the rules was an integral component of this work. Since 2006, the Sidewalk Landscaping Permit process has been in place, enabling any property owner in the city (residential, commercial, industrial, schools, etc) to convert its excess pavement frontages. Projects have been completed in nearly every district, from the Marina to the Bayview and from Downtown to the Sunset. Converting at higher elevations maximizes stormwater diversion benefits. While obvious potential exist in San Francisco's wide sidewalks, small and narrow spaces present their own opportunities. This approach can be applied to other public areas such as vacant lots, medians and redundant streets.

