

STREET REDESIGN

Shift Design Studio

The proposed renovations encourage and support the use of this alley which has become off-limits due to crime and filth. The canyon-like space of this lengthy block is segmented into several exterior rooms in addition to the mid-block plaza which becomes a new destination, providing a cultural amenity to locals and tourists alike. Art and ecological features along the way expand the use of the space from mere passage to encouraging visitors to take an active interest in their surroundings – and rewarding them for it. Further, it alters the way birds and butterflies engage the space, by including them and supporting their needs.

The most significant strengthening this project contributes to its surroundings is cultural. In the heart of a global commercial center, it proudly incubates small-scale home-grown talent which it readily presents to an international audience. Both the rotating micro-vendors and the comprehensive art program provide an ongoing specific cultural experience in contrast to that of the largely undifferentiated mass markets represented in the adjacent shopping areas.

Additional strengthening lies in the less noticeable accommodation of emergency vehicles, garage entries, loading, street cleaning and support of existing and proposed social uses.

Extrapolating a primary lesson of this renovation, namely making specific rather than generic places, a vision of a more intimate, creative and personable public space experience emerges. Leveraging quirks of a site rather than normalizing them often adds a level of specificity that makes a place unique, interesting and memorable. Activating or programming parts of buildings that face public areas crosses a traditional barrier that yields considerable opportunities for real engagement with merchants, artisans or other uses. Alleys are only one of many underutilized types of underutilized urban public space. Across the city, excess pavement in the form of medians, redundant streets, parking lots, and wide sidewalks present numerous opportunities for improvement through design.

