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Best creative space Warehouse 30, Bangkok

In the Thai capital, where the shiny and new is often all the rage, Duangrit Bunnag is a contrarian voice. The architect-turned-developer plays pied piper to Bangkok's bohemian set who flock to his Jam Factory, launched in 2013 on the Chao Phraya River. Here he renovated a cluster of dilapidated concrete factories and turned them into a coffee shop, art gallery, book nook and the Never Ending Summer restaurant.

Praised for his avant garde hotel designs, Jam Factory propelled Bunnag into the ranks of Asia's hottest architect-developers. In March his own hotel brand Bocage debuted in Hua Hin, a seaside getaway two hours south of Bangkok, with a property boasting six minimalist suites.

His biggest project to date is a more ambitious version of Jam Factory. Nine old warehouses behind the Portuguese embassy have been converted into a market. The centrepiece will be a concept store showcasing Bunnag's designs along with creations by like-minded artists. Warehouse 30, as Bunnag calls it, will also have studio space, restaurants and bars.

The warehouses have a more vintage look than Jam Factory and date back to the Second World War. The surrounding area is old Bangkok's most historic, filled with churches and temples that go back centuries. Bunnag is keen to inject new life into the district: "I'm dancing with the concept," he says. "We will build the space and see what happens." — RG dbalp.com



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Best heritage revival Casa Burés, Barcelona

Restoration on the façade of a heritage building can often mask a different reality inside as developers gut the interior. However, in Barcelona a painstaking project is proving more than skin deep. Built in 1900, Casa Burés was once overflowing with frescoes and flora-inspired fixtures – but apart from squatters the building has been empty since the 1980s. This combination of desertion and destruction has complicated Bonavista Developments' plan to transform the building into 26 homes.

"Maintaining the value of the interior isn't just about being harmonious with what is on the outside," says project manager Manfredo Navarro. "It is also our duty to safeguard the finer details of the city's heritage." — LA bonavistadev.com



Q&A

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A living city Thomas Jakoubek CEO, BAI, Vienna

Thomas Jakoubek is the developer behind both Wien-Mitte, Vienna's transport hub and mixed-use building that was completed in 2013, and DC1, Austria's tallest skyscraper. He discusses Vienna's challenges and what the future holds.

Visitors coming from the airport arrive in Wien-Mitte. What's its backstory?

Wien-Mitte took 25 years to complete because of the site's complexity. We predicted visitor numbers would be 25,000 to 28,000 per day in the mall but now we have 47,000 per day. We sold it to Morgan Stanley in 2015 – a confirmation that we did it right. Property is an investment and these funds secure our future.

Vienna is rapidly growing by 20,000 to 30,000 people a year. How can it cope?

The city will continue to grow. You can see it in residential trends: apartment prices are higher but size is smaller. Circumstances have changed: most young people don't sit at home. We're not planning for now but for the next generation.

What could Vienna do differently, in your opinion?

We could do more in the cultural and business areas. We need more mixed use in the city.

Should a property developer be a visionary?

Ideally, but it's the exception. Property development gets increasingly complex: the social, economic and sustainable aspects of a building all have to be there. Vienna is a living city and we have to use its possibilities intelligently. — KB bai.at

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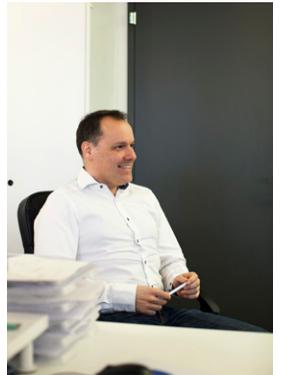
Most innovative approach Projekt Interim, Zürich

Six years ago a group of Zürich residents banded together to find affordable work studios, eventually renting an empty bank that they turned into creative and business spaces. The experience revealed an opportunity and the group went on to found Projekt Interim, a firm that works with landlords to fill their properties until permanent residents and businesses move in.

Projekt Interim now operates in Geneva, Bern and Basel, as well as the hinterlands, converting vacancies into opportunities for artists, musicians, architects, graphic designers, galleries, start-ups and even pop-up restaurants to flourish. The temporary space offers respite from the onerous property markets of these cities. The team has transformed more than 80 buildings, with occupants who all signed up through word of mouth, paying a fraction of the market value.

"We lend, we don't rent," says Lukas Amacher, one of the three founders of Projekt Interim. Occupants, whether living or working in the spaces, are not considered tenants. "Part of the reason there are empty buildings is because of tenant laws," says Amacher. "Landlords vacate a building months ahead of time because they don't want problems with tenants refusing to leave." That can leave empty properties and lifeless streets.

Temporary users pay the expenses, such as heat and electricity – costs that landlords would otherwise have to pay themselves. As a result, owners have flocked to collaborate with Projekt Interim to eliminate those costs and also prevent vandalism and especially squatting, a common concern in Switzerland. In turn, occupants gain an affordable, if short-lived, space to work. Cities, too, boost their vibrancy as daunting rental prices can threaten the urban lifeblood of creativity. — LR projekt-interim.ch



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