



## Making Good

The art of survival -- and the universe -- finds new meaning at the Goodman

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By Amy Linn

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Arts activist Martha Senger knows the difference between chaos and a condominium. Distinctly, in fact. But when it comes to the lofts and work spaces at 18th and Arkansas on Potrero Hill -- a gleaming new home for dispossessed and devoted artists -- she can't help but see a convergence.

"Certain theorists recognize that chaos is not disorder -- it's a source of infinitely complex order," says Senger, executive director of the Artspace Development Corporation (ARTSDECO), the nonprofit dedicated to building what's been dubbed the Goodman 2, a reincarnation of the original Goodman building, the artists mecca and cause célèbre from which 26 tenants were evicted in 1983.

The first of its kind in San Francisco, the neoindustrial, nearly completed Goodman 2 is a jigsaw puzzle of rental units, condos, shared living areas, and a performance space for artists who crave collaboration. And it owes its existence to random events that finally, inevitably, says Senger, brought a second coming.

"It's a thrilling discovery," says Senger -- her thoughts are a bird that lands in surprising places -- "that the chance and random are not: that there is in everything a very, very fine, built-in order that is spontaneous, self-organizing, organically forming, like a flower or anything else that grows from its own internal pattern."

Perhaps not like a fragile flower -- perhaps more like a sturdy, slow-growing ponderosa pine -- the Goodman 2 is as good an example as any that order, and even cheap digs, can emerge from what appears to be totally chaotic soil. A rare and well-hung spider, a brewery foe, neighborhood opponents, financial woes -- all conspired, at various times, to doom the Goodman 2 to failure.

"I've been holding my breath on this thing for 12 years," says Gary Robert, 53, a photographer and multimedia artist who, like Senger, lived and worked in the original Goodman building at Geary and Van Ness until the day in 1983 when the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency seized the building and gave it to a developer, for transformation into low-income housing. The Goodman residents -- Janis Joplin is among its more famous early alumni -- had fought to save their home with historic-preservation petitions, development proposals, media appeals, and every other tool on their political palette.

They lost. Robert moved to the Cadillac Hotel in the hard heart of the Tenderloin, as did other Goodman refugees; many more fled from the city, rent hikes and gentrification nipping at their heels.

It was a typical outflux, says Stephen Goldstine, director of graduate studies at the California College of Arts and Crafts and former president of the San Francisco Art Institute. The age-old problem: Developers covet what artists call home; in particular, developers have driven up rents in the former niches south of Market.



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"There's been a steady exodus from the city since the 1970s," Goldstine says.

The Goodman 2, with 29 live/work lofts slated to be available by fall -- six of them market-rate condos, five of them rentals reserved for former Goodman dwellers, and the rest low-cost condos -- will solve only a fraction of that problem. And some former Goodman tenants say they're sorry the new building isn't all rental units, like its alma mater. But Robert, who intends to move in as soon as he can, says he's grateful, nevertheless, that the new, pumpkin-colored, corrugated-metal-coated structure exists.

"I got more done in two and a half years at the Goodman building than I'd ever done in my life" -- including a photo book on the punk rock scene called Loud 3-D, shot in stereo, Robert says. "There's so much spirit and energy radiated by that kind of mass creativity. I have been so energized in the last six months since we've been able to just go into the new building."

The old building, from the 1940s to its final days, was almost completely populated by dancers, painters, and visual explorers, including psychedelic poster master Wes Wilson and a cast of alternately ebullient and introverted others. The upstairs offered good light and high ceilings; the downstairs offered a community theater and galleries. The rents, amazingly, ranged from \$60 to \$80 a month, recalls Senger, who moved there in 1972. "We had defined a four-dimensional psycho-physical equation, a whole that was more than its parts," she writes of her time there.

The halcyon headiness ended when the Redevelopment Agency in 1973 plastered an eviction notice on the door. Tenants fought the piece of paper for the next 10 years, meeting weekly to plot strategy, writing grants, forming their own development corporation (GOODCO, later to become ARTSDECO), and brainstorming alternatives to the city's proposals for the building. Dozens of organizations rallied to the cause, from the National Endowment for the Arts to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

And in the end, the protest did bring a key concession. The city, under then-Mayor Dianne Feinstein, offered the displaced artists \$570,000 to find a new building.

But Senger and others found nothing they could afford; nothing that would suit their needs. After years of frustration, they turned to private developer Rick Holliday to build a Goodman 2 from scratch. And they laid plans to build on a weedy, vacant lot at 18th and Arkansas.

Foes weren't far behind.

"Everyone else looked at it as a vacant lot filled with dog shit and broken glass. But to the community, it was open space that needed to be saved," says R.G. Davis, an artist, writer, Potrero Hill resident, founder of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, cousin of (now) Oakland Raiders owner Al Davis, and one of the Goodman 2's fiercest opponents.

"Serpentine rock is there. Starlings live there. Creeks are there," says Davis. "Every time you eliminate open space, you lose nature in the city. And the developers manipulate both the artists and the environmental movement so they can keep on building until there's wall-to-wall buildings in every spot and nature becomes the enemy."

Some 1,400 residents signed petitions to stop the Goodman 2. They also sought help from a blind harvestman spider. Bright orange and about the size of a pinhead -- its most notable feature is a male sexual organ nearly as big as its entire body -- the harvestman population is considered at risk in California, which means that construction projects can legally be stopped if they encroach on the insect's habitat.

At the request of Goodman 2 foes, Darrell Ubick, entomologist with the California Academy of Sciences, told San Francisco planners -- he first examined the wrong address but later went back to the right place -- that it was possible the spider lived on the Goodman 2 lot. City planners insisted a search be made for the bug the next time it rained, when the insects tend to surface. Unfortunately, the drought was on.

"We didn't find any spiders," says Ubick, who returned to 18th and Arkansas when the weather finally did cooperate. "There was a lot of introduced vegetation, it was sort of a trashed habitat. And these guys go for undisturbed habitats."

The spider snafu cost the project six months lost work time and about \$100,000, says developer Holliday. At the

same time, the Anchor Brewing Co. was describing the Goodman 2 as one more assault on Potrero Hill's status as an industrial area: Gentrification hurts us, too, brewery officials declared, because it drives up property values beyond what an industrial facility can pay. A cannery, a coffee factory, and a soap factory had all left the area, and if more residents moved in, the brewery might be the next to go.

Eventually, the brewery declared the Goodman 2 proposal satisfactory. Neighbors didn't quit as easily. They planted a protest totem pole at 19th and Arkansas, yellow-billed and wide-eyed, its back to the new construction. "It was our attempt to claim the land for the people," says Davis.

And in their attempt to claim the land for the artists, meanwhile, attorney Stephen Taber, president of ARTSDECO, and others on the ARTSDECO board continued to struggle for a financing package that would both keep the project afloat and the units affordable. The original goal of building low-cost rentals could not be achieved in today's lending climate, Senger says. The compromise: five rentals for \$485 a month; 18 \$90,000 to \$111,000 condos, for first-time homeowners with incomes of no more than \$27,000 per year; and six market-rate condos, \$140,000 to \$255,000 apiece. Even the residents of the high-price condos must be artists willing to live collaboratively in an "organic, bohemian, low-cost way of living that creates connection and community coming out of shared work," comments Senger.

"We call it 'reconstructive architecture,' " she says. "It brings the pieces back together that have been torn down by atomized society."

In addition to the original \$570,000, the city has provided \$33,000 in grants, and will give \$20,000 in homeownership assistance loans to each of the 18 low-income buyers, says Alicia Klein, project manager for the mayor's Office of Housing.

Meanwhile, as with everything chaotic, there have been glitches. Construction costs exceeded predictions by several hundred thousand dollars, Klein says, and now ARTSDECO, Holliday, and Hearthstone Advisors, the company that financed the project, must negotiate a solution. ARTSDECO believes Hearthstone agreed to build the project for one price and should eat the extra cost. Hearthstone believes ARTSDECO might have to cough up more dough before it can hand the nonprofit the keys.

"What is an eligible cost for them to pay and what's not eligible is not really resolved," says Holliday. "But we've been through a lot, and we're all reasonable people, so my sense is there's a finish line out there and it's not far off."

Senger, too, has faith. So these days she leads tours of the new building, architect Baker occasionally in tow. Inside are a welter of odd angles, skylights, windows, an atrium, terraced landscaping, an outdoor amphitheater, a performance space, and beyond it the future home of a multimedia center.

If all goes well and financial sponsors step forward, the Goodman 2 will house a visiting artist and an apprentice program, bringing a talented young artist from one of the city's housing projects to live in the building and practice a craft, says Senger. The concrete floors and 14-foot ceilings will become a canvas, of sorts.

"It's a torus, the doughnut-shaped structure of the universe that allows for the unfolding of the mind," Senger says. She pauses for a moment and imagines the place months from now, people sprawled on couches, paint in their hair.

"Damn, I made a mistake -- there's a right angle in this building," jokes Baker. "I wanted to build it like a penis," he confides later, referring to his profession's propensity for Washington Monument-ish forms. "But the artists turned it into a womb."