



Emerging architects expand design firm boundaries - by Jeffrey Ramirez

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Most architects believe in the power of design to positively impact the lives of the people who experience it. Still, new firms often start out with architecture as their sole focus and then, as projects requirements arise, enlist consultants and partner firms to collaborate in other allied design disciplines. Most architecture offices do not bring other disciplines in-house until they are much larger and can support a studio structure of teams working under a cadre of partners.

A new trend among the next generation turns this notion on its head. New and emerging architecture firms are aiming to go beyond architecture to expand the boundaries of traditional “full service” design. The UP studio aims to deliver architecture, interior, and brand design together in every project, following the multi-disciplinary example of firms like Snohetta and Pentagram.

Brand and graphic design have a valuable role in all phases of architectural and property development projects—from the creation of compelling architectural graphics, the integration of signage and wayfinding, the design of client branding and collateral materials, the development of project logotypes and websites, to other applications. Mudgil Practices, a recently completed joint doctor’s office in Hicksville, is a prime example of brand design working together with architecture and interiors to create a unique identity for the practice that attracts patients and helps them feel at ease.

Several architecture firms are now taking on real estate development as a core part of their practices. Onion Flats in Philadelphia has pushed the boundaries of architecture into construction and sustainable urban real estate development with market rate and affordable residential projects. MODERNest in Toronto develops contemporary urban homes as a development outgrowth of a small architectural firm. And The UP studio is now taking on self-initiated real estate development projects focused on attracting and keeping young professionals on Long Island. Each of these firms has likely looked to the success of Alloy Development as a model for merging architecture and development under the same roof.

Recent projects: Mudgil Practices and
“Build UP // West Beech.”

Good design helps architects better explain their concepts, helps developers market their projects, and helps real estate teams sell their properties faster. “Build UP // West Beech” in Long Beach, UP’s first self-initiated development project, applies those ideas to develop concept-driven architecture within one of Long Island’s most vibrant, walkable downtowns. The brand design for West Beech, as seen in a stand-alone project website, has played an essential role in the sale of the property as it nears completion.

A growing number of successful examples, including West Beech, demonstrates the validity of emerging firms blending design and development.

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