



The Anita May Rosenstein Campus for the Los Angeles LGBT Center, designed by Leong Leong in collaboration with Killefer Flammang Architects (KFA), offers social services and housing for vulnerable populations. Photo: Iwan Baan

Leong Leong

Brothers Christopher and Dominic Leong shape the social experiences in buildings that do good and look good

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Building affordable housing—particularly affordable housing for communities traditionally overlooked and underserved—is not for the faint of heart. The myriad complexities of navigating diverse funding streams and institutional bureaucracies too often thwart the best-laid plans of even the most socially conscious architects and developers. Given the challenges, doing good is difficult enough; looking good while you’re doing it can be nearly impossible.

“It’s hard to determine what part architecture, with a capital A, plays in that process,” says Dominic Leong, a founding partner, along with his brother, Christopher, in the New York–based architecture firm and creative agency Leong Leong. “Chris and I think of architecture as a medium that inherently deals with social issues—it’s part of the architect’s role to address the needs of an evolving society. That’s the task of our generation, to redefine architecture as a social practice *and* an aesthetics practice.”



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Christopher and Dominic Leong. Photo: Peter Ash Lee

That philosophy is a marked departure from the academic discourse that held sway during the brothers' school years, when architecture was framed largely as a formalist

exercise, with a particular emphasis on aesthetic innovation abetted by the digital age. “Back then, if you were considered a socially conscious architect, it was assumed there was something lacking in the design. Or vice versa, that great, progressive architecture was somehow the sole province of the wealthy. Our goal has always been to realign that thinking,” Leong explains.

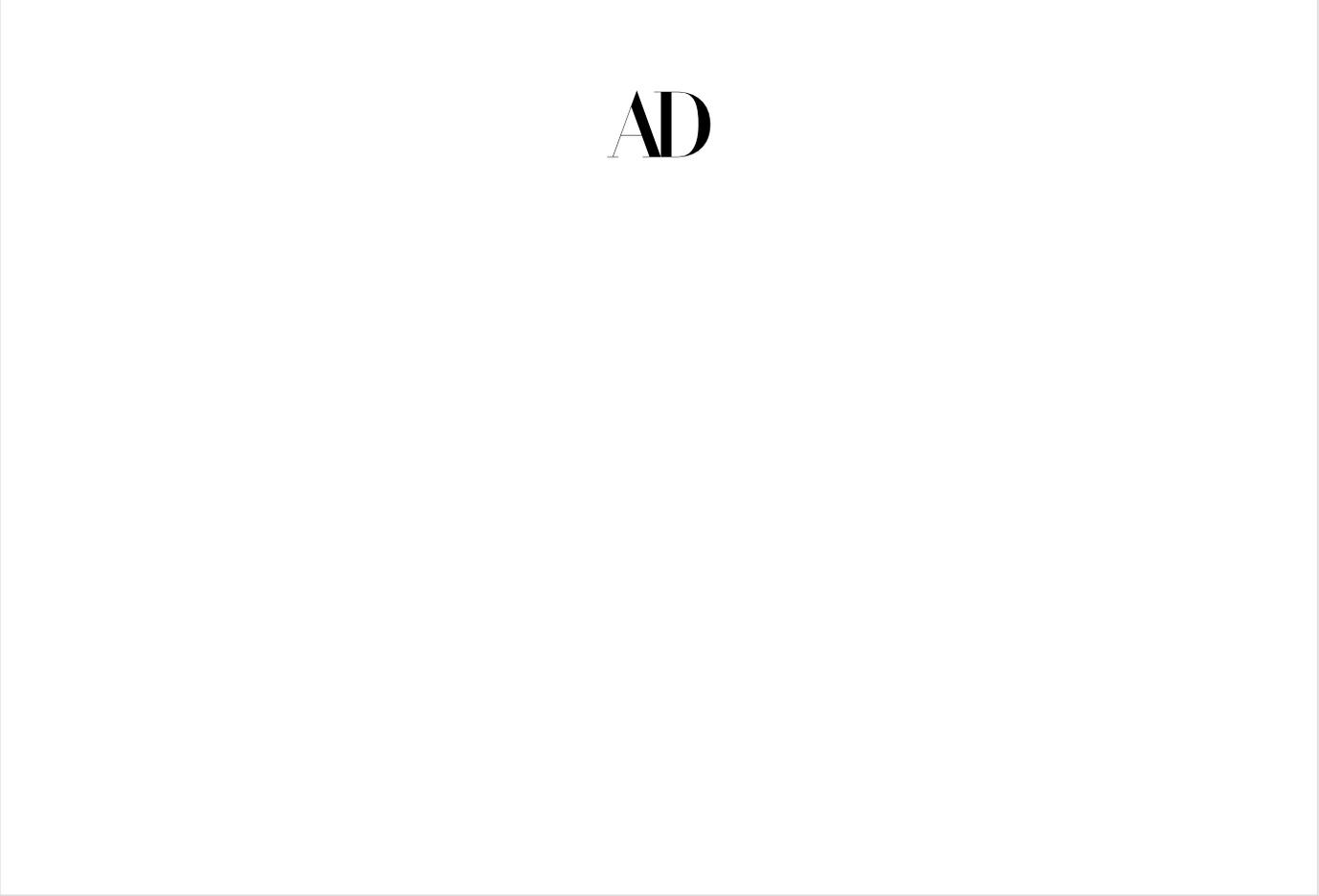
The commission to design the Anita May Rosenstein Campus for the Los Angeles LGBT Center—a project Leong Leong undertook in collaboration with executive architect Killefer Flammang Architects (KFA)—provided an ideal opportunity to demonstrate a more enlightened attitude about the confluence of high design and social responsibility. The campus, which occupies nearly an entire city block in the heart of Hollywood, was conceived as an intergenerational community, with social services and housing specifically dedicated to vulnerable populations of youth and seniors. The first phase of the sprawling, 180,000-square-foot project—an instant landmark on Santa Monica Boulevard, with a bold civic presence that departs dramatically from the purposefully discreet, inward-looking LGBT Center projects of yesteryear—opened in 2019.

The latest addition to the campus—again created as a collaboration between Leong Leong and KFA, working with affordable housing developer Thomas Saffron & Associates—is the Ariadne Getty Foundation Senior Housing Complex, a five-story building for low-income LGBTQ Angelenos over the age of 62. With nearly 100 apartments, the senior housing facilities fulfill the promise of a true intergenerational compound set out in the original master plan. (Last year, the Center opened a 26-unit youth housing complex just across the street from the new building.)

“The definition of family within these communities is different than the traditional, antiquated notion of the nuclear family. We had to make these spaces feel animated, social, and coherent, while still making allowances for privacy and security,” Leong says, underscoring his firm’s vision of a porous yet connected campus able to balance a host of complicated, sometimes contradictory imperatives.

Along with their work for the LGBT Center in L.A., Leong Leong is currently engaged in multiple proposals and studies to design affordable housing, from Maui to Brooklyn’s Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood, including a grant from the nonprofit advocacy group Asian Americans for Equality to develop pandemic-resilient housing for

overcrowded Asian American immigrant communities. “The social aspect of architecture is a through line in all our work. Even when we’re doing luxury retail, we’re examining the ways in which people convene, how architecture shapes social experiences,” Leong concludes. It’s one more salvo in the firm’s mission to make doing good and looking good two sides of the same coin.

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