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Technicolor magic

A *Wizard of Oz*-inspired mural by local artist Jen Stark often appears in social media posts about Culver City's Platform mall, which has 20,000 Instagram followers.

RESTORING THE MALL

The Platform shopping center in Los Angeles is offering retailers a chance to try something new.

By Sheila Marikar

Photographs by Ye Rin Mok

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As malls across the country succumb to declining foot traffic and the lure of online shopping, a development in Los Angeles's artsy Culver City neighborhood is proving that it's still possible to draw customers in person—if you design the right experience. Called Platform, the year-and-a-half-old space is a cluster of boutiques, workout studios, offices, and restaurants by up-and-coming chefs, all housed in an Instagram-worthy refurbished industrial complex. As customers line up for the mall's free yoga classes and stroll through its outdoor gardens, Platform is emerging as a template for a new kind of shopping experience.

Developers David Fishbein and Joey Miller, principals of the real estate company Runyon Group, prioritize experimentation. To secure a lease, each of the 26 long-term tenants had to offer an experience unique to its Platform location. At the on-site Sweetgreen, for example, customers can choose one of the fast-casual chain's salad staples or sample a dish from the

in-house test kitchen. (Sweetgreen's headquarters are located in the development too.) At Reformation, shoppers who prefer not to sort through racks of clothes can order styles from touch screens installed throughout the boutique. Fishbein and Miller also set aside spaces for short-term pop-ups, which online surfboard maker Salt Surf and event producer Spring Street Social Society have used as launching pads to physical retail. "We thought we knew who our customer [would be], but there was no way to know until we opened," says Fishbein. "The pop-ups allow this period of discovery to continue."

Fishbein and Miller have also given visitors plenty to post about online. They commissioned L.A. artist Jen Stark to paint an 80-foot-high mural on one of Platform's buildings, and a #HELLOPLATFORM sign greets customers as they arrive. Brightly colored tables and chairs sit outside the low-rise buildings, and a playlist featuring artists such



Stay awhile

The founders of Spring Street Social Society use their pop-up, above, to showcase products from their favorite artisans. Visitors to the boutique, called Stay, can browse the store's handmade goods—or take advantage of the couches, chairs, and free Wi-Fi.



Coast to coast

Developers Joey Miller, far left, and David Fishbein have opened Platform to East Coast companies, such as Salt Surf, above, and Brooklyn-based clothing store Bird, right.





as Grimes and Glass Animals is pumped through common spaces. "People are photographing every activity they're doing," says Fishbein. "[If] you can create these unique moments people want to be associated with, you can be a place they want to come back to." The strategy is working so far: Fishbein says the average tenant is on track to take in \$850 per square foot in annual sales, compared to an estimated \$165 per square foot in shopping centers nationwide. "Traditional malls are formulaic," says Jeff Green, founder of the real estate consultancy Jeff Green Partners. "There's a Bath & Body Works in every center. [At Platform,] you don't know what you're going to find when you come back." For Fishbein and Miller, it comes down to that element of surprise. Soon they'll have even more room to experiment. In the coming months, they will add another 6,000 square feet of retail space to Platform, along with three new restaurants. ●

Call of the mall

Above: The Edit boutique is a collaboration between footwear brand Freda Salvador and accessories designer Janessa Leoné.

Right: Platform's outdoor spaces have become popular spots for working.

Below right: Platform houses the first permanent location of Loqui, a taco shop that began as an experiment in San Francisco's famous Tartine bakery.



New tastes

Above: Reformation's use of technology allows employees to spend less time maintaining the store and more time assisting customers.

