



The second floor has a flexible layout and includes test kitchens, offices, and media-production spaces.

Converge Architecture creates a culinary hub and urban farm in a former warehouse complex.

CHICAGO'S West Loop is a neighborhood in transition. What was once a feverish industrial center has, since the aughts, ceded ground to a burgeoning restaurant scene, along with a growing crop of residential and commercial developments. The change in character brings with it a tension between new and longtime residents, and conflicting aspirations as to what the area should be. On a corner of West Carroll Avenue, in the heart of West Loop, an adaptive-reuse project designed by Bureau Gemmell and New Office, two Chicago-based architecture firms, straddles both worlds with an inventive weaving of programs for The Roof Crop, an urban-agriculture initiative with green-roof

design, farming, and media interests.

The 30,000-square-foot project expands and reconfigures a high-bay warehouse and a two-story office annex dating from the 1920s, which Bureau Gemmell had renovated in 2014 to support the client's operations. In 2020, the client sought to expand the scope of the company and commissioned Bureau Gemmell to lead a second, more comprehensive transformation to accommodate new uses. The firm paired up with the larger team at New Office, as consulting architect on the job, and the two studios have since consolidated to form Converge Architecture.

The ground floor now includes public-facing venues, like a coffee bar and a retail

space, and a restaurant (Maxwell's Trading). Above, the second floor, shared with Flashpoint Innovation, a Chicago-based food and beverage consultancy, hosts a film studio for culinary media, test kitchens, offices, and a private dining and event space. At the rooftop, an urban farm and greenhouses—designed and operated by the client—supply produce to the programs below.

"The client expressed their goals as exploring how the space could be used to work collaboratively with business partners, like the restaurants they provide produce to," notes Bureau Gemmell's Lynsey Sorrell. "There was also a strong desire to retain the patina of the building."



The kitchens and restaurant are minimally detailed (above, left and right). The existing warehouse was expanded and topped with greenhouses (left). A rooftop farm (opposite) provides produce to the programs below.



Making room for all the additional programming required the removal of the warehouse's timber roof trusses and the insertion of up to 10½ feet of wall height—concrete masonry units fronted with brick—to raise the roofline above the existing parapet. The new second-story floor plate and the roof slab are composed of precast concrete planks; both are supported by new and old masonry and structural steel. Additional shoring work strengthened the foundations below grade. The expansion yielded approximately 6,000 square feet of interior space and 9,000 square feet of outdoor space.

The interior finishes throughout are subtle. Smooth and grooved plaster walls stand unadorned; century-old brick remains scuffed and unevenly mortared; and exposed structural elements, such as a handful of original steel columns tucked behind the restaurant's bar, were cleaned and left exposed. Natural materials that include stone and wood comprise countertops and shelving in the kitchens, and white tiling serves

as backsplashes and wall finishes. Overhead, wood ceiling baffles provide a measure of acoustical diffusion and also do duty in partially obscuring mechanical systems—pendant lamps and bulbs slip through their openings. Notably, approximately 40 percent of the baffles are recycled birch and maple planks, sourced from The Roof Crop's temporary headquarters during construction. New and expanded windows, casement at ground level and glass-block on the second floor, provide abundant daylight within these spaces.

From street level, the urban farm and greenhouses, which also function as a rentable event space, are the most conspicuous element of this recent intervention. Their minimal dark-steel silhouettes, sans bracing, were made possible by tucking structural anchors into the concrete masonry walls at the second level.

The sum of all these parts creates an inviting culinary destination that only enhances its formerly rough-and-tumble industrial setting. ■ *Matthew Marani*

CREDITS

ARCHITECT: Converge Architecture — Lynsey Sorrell, Steven Karvelius, principals; Elliott Rikken, project architect

ENGINEERS: Goodfriend Magruder (structural); BTR Engineering (m/e/p/tp)

CONSULTANT: WDA Design (interiors)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: LG Construction

CLIENTS: The Roof Crop, Flashpoint Innovation, and Underscore Hospitality

SIZE: 30,000 square feet

COST: \$7.1 million

COMPLETION DATE: May 2024

SOURCES

STRUCTURE: Fabcon Precast (concrete planks); Superb Steel

MASONRY: Northfield Block (concrete masonry units); Ragland Brick

ENVELOPE: Air-Shield, Henry (air barrier)

INTERIOR FINISHES: Benjamin Moore (paints and stains); Monoglass (acoustic insulation)

HARDWARE: Falcon (closers); Allegion (exit devices); Steel Craft (doors); LaMarco Systems

PLUMBING: Kohler, Advanced Tabco (sinks); Watermark (faucets)

GREENHOUSES: Wisconsin Greenhouse Company