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EXCLUSIVE

People are Staying After 5:00 in DTSD

By [Carrie Rossenfeld](#) | San Diego

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Simons: "You're seeing another wave of urbanization in Downtown San Diego; it's really become a destination."

SAN DIEGO—The **Downtown submarket** is becoming a destination as the area undergoes a wave of urbanization and outreach to the community, **SVA Architects'** president and partner **Bob Simons** tells GlobeSt.com exclusively. Last fall, the firm received a **Builder's Choice Grand Award** from **BUILDER Magazine** for its high-rise **affordable mixed-use rental development Celadon** at 9th and Broadway in the East Village of Downtown San Diego. SVA also recently began construction on the **South Campus Plaza**, a mixed-use **student-housing and retail** project on the **SDSU** campus. We spoke with Simons about the firm's growth and **design/development** trends in San Diego.

GlobeSt.com: What is behind the firm's recent and current growth?

Simons: Obviously, the economy has helped it a bit. School bonds had passed, and there's more revenue out there in the industry. Also, our **rebranding**, when we went from **MVEI** to SVA Architects some six months ago, has helped our growth, too. We were known as more of a public-oriented firm for education and a broad list of

institutional projects, but now SVA Architects represents our diversity. My strength has been in the public sector, but I've also been in the private sector and in **transit-oriented design**, and that diversity has contributed to our growth. We're well established now, and we're putting in the time. When you do good work, people come to you. Our core people have been with use for decades, literally. You owe your strength to the core people you have working with you.



This rendering of SDSU's College Ave. North development is part of the South Campus Plaza project that SVA has helped design. The project spans nearly 350,000 square feet and is being designed to achieve LEED Silver certification.

retail with student housing above it, and it will bring great vitality. This is a change in the industry. **San Francisco State University** is experimenting with a similar project to create revenue streams for the college. We're seeing those kinds of changes, and San Diego Unified is growing—they passed bonds a few years ago and are looking at projects.

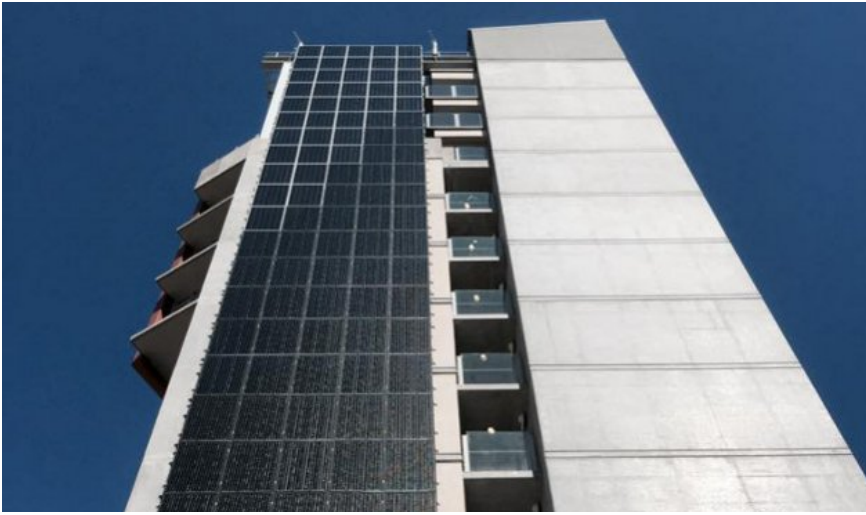
GlobeSt.com: What trends are you noticing in terms of development in San Diego?

Simons: You're seeing another wave of **urbanization** in Downtown San Diego; it's really become a destination. People don't leave after 5:00 anymore. There are things to do, and people want to live near and be part of that urban downtown feeling. We're seeing that in L.A. and San Diego. We just finished Celadon on 9th and Broadway—250 units of mixed-use affordable housing we developed with **BRIDGE Development**, a large non-profit developer. It has street-level retail and **restaurants**, and it's reaching out to the community. This trend is a good use of space, and it really shows the value of Downtown San Diego land.

We're also working with **San Diego State University** on College Ave. developing the South Campus project, which features a new trend in student housing: mixed use. There will be 35,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet of

GlobeSt.com: What design trends do you think will become more common over the next few years?

Simons: **Sustainability**, and it has to do with these campuses. There are lots of ways to save money by developing much more sustainable



Celadon has 143 feet of photovoltaic array on the building's side, from the ground floor up.

projects. For example, Celadon has 143 feet of photovoltaic array on the side of the building—it starts at the ground and goes straight up 143 feet. This is an opportunity to augment power. It also has solar panels that take care of 30% of the hot-water requirements for the school. There are 250 units, so that translates into energy savings. Sustainability is a trend we try to impart on every one of our projects. The more we start implementing these ideas in these projects, the more time there is for long-term savings.

GlobeSt.com: *What do you find interesting about the latest development projects in San Diego on which you have been working?*

Simons: We're working with **San Diego Unified School District** right now on public charter schools. **Einstein Elementary** was a public elementary school that became a public

charter school, and they're looking at developing a new master plan for that and a plan for long-term growth for that campus. It's a community-based school that ultimately focuses on specific educational opportunities. We're seeing some specialization in these kinds of **developments**. The biggest trend on the private side is taking small parcels of land, urbanizing them and creating larger density to that site because land is getting more expensive and harder to come by. We're seeing public institutions sitting on properties and seeing opportunities for revenue sources, so they're putting them out there as a **ground-lease opportunity**. They're looking to private developers to see what can be developed that can create consistent revenue streams to sustain them for some time.

The big trend for universities is to have that campus experience rather than be a commuter school. We're seeing so much growth at these universities. **UCSD** is building student housing like crazy, and it provides a great revenue stream for them.

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About Our Columnist



Carrie Rossenfeld is a reporter for the West Coast region of GlobeSt.com and Real Estate Forum. She was a trade-magazine and newsletter editor in New York City before moving to Southern California to become a freelance writer and editor for magazines, books and websites. Rossenfeld has written extensively on topics including commercial real estate, running a medical practice, intellectual-property licensing and giftware. She has edited books about profiting from real estate and has ghostwritten a book about starting a home-based business.

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