

Elevating Your Office-to-Residential Conversions: Expert Insights

Discover a few top strategies from Soto, a leading architecture firm, emphasizing curb appeal and seamless MEP system integration in transformation projects.

By Natalie Dolce

As GlobeSt.com recently reported, there are now clear signs that a drive to adapt underused office space in many of the nation's cities for other uses is under way. The 100 office conversions due to be completed this year represent more than double the annual average of 41 between 2016 and 2022, we recently reported. So, as the conversation around what to do with empty office space continues throughout U.S. cities, how to actually accomplish that goal becomes the major question. The reality is that a conversion is a very complex undertaking, according to Fernando Bonilla-Verdesoto, principal of architecture firm Soto, who has worked on several projects, the most notable being The Oxford.

Below are a few key tips and design considerations he says are important to note.

Investigate existing conditions and maximize rentable square footage

The first step is to document as much information about the building as possible. Original floor plans are ideal, but anything that provides clues about how the building is structured will be helpful, he says. And while maximizing rentable square footage might seem obvious, given the very different floorplates between office and residential buildings, "you have to get very creative when formulating the layout of a living space," he says.

Integrate New MEP Systems Efficiently

Integrating the mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineering (MEP) systems in a strategic and efficient way in a potentially centuries-old office building is arguably the most challenging aspect of any conversion project, he notes.

Creative Solutions to Enhance Curb Appeal and Thoughtful Amenities and Common Areas

"There is a clear and distinct difference between the entryway of a welcoming apartment building and a formal lobby of a corporate office building. In order to transform an office entryway to be ready to welcome residents into their new home, one must adapt and include textures, finishes and landscaping to achieve a residential feel," he explains. In addition, he explains that older office buildings lack the amenities found in brand new apartment buildings like state-of-the-art fitness centers, dog spas, mail and package centers, workspaces, common areas and game rooms. "Apartment-style living has come a long way," he says.