

CASE STUDY

COMMERCIAL COMMUNITIES

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Developers Turn to Metal Building Systems to Usher in a New Era in Retail

It's no secret that the retail industry naturally evolves alongside shifting consumer preferences; but the convenience of online shopping has resulted in unprecedented challenges leading to high store vacancy rates and declining foot traffic. In an effort to stay profitable and relevant amidst these changing trends, forward-thinking retail developers are looking beyond the traditional strip mall and department store models of the past when considering development projects for the future.

Many believe a solution lies in the rising popularity of the trendy new niche of commercial communities, which are designed to offer personalized social opportunities and conscious shopping experiences that e-commerce simply can't provide. These expansive outdoor markets boast an array of artisan goods in campus-like settings that draw people out of their homes and into unique community spaces. Visitors can partake in farm-to-table cuisine, listen to live music, support local businesses and enjoy food and beverages produced on-site—all while shopping for the things they need and want.

These commercial communities appear poised to usher in a new era that could redefine and revitalize the modern shopping experience at a time when the industry is at an inflection point—and developers are already relying on metal building systems as the method of construction to make these hip, high-end spaces a reality.

Commercial Communities Typically Include:

- Back-end production space
- Front-end retail space
- Breweries, distilleries and wineries
- Products like cheese, bread, coffee, tea
- Restaurants
- Makers markets
- Artisan crafts
- Retail/clothing
- Outdoor music venues
- Event space
- Music and art
- Produce markets
- Nonprofit and startup offices
- Yoga and fitness activities

Metal building systems are well-suited to accommodate commercial communities for a variety of reasons. Here are some key factors:

Metal buildings create open, column-free interior space.

That’s important for makers markets, which often house breweries or wineries that require room for large equipment and production. The long-span frames and strong structural steel supports help meet the space requirements of a large production facility without the need for interior columns.

Metal buildings are inherently versatile, and can be changed over time.

In expansive retail communities, vendors and vendor space can change, and the modular nature of metal buildings allows for interior spaces to be easily configured and reconfigured at will. That level of flexibility can accommodate future expansion or unanticipated retail changes later down the road.

Metal buildings can be erected quickly, so developers can see a speedy ROI.

For a developer on a timeline, metal building systems are a smart economic choice compared to other forms of construction. They can be built in about two-thirds the time of conventional construction because the innovative design-build process is fast and the erection approach is straightforward.



Metal buildings are environmentally friendly.

These structures are made of eco-friendly and sustainable materials. Their energy-efficiency characteristics allow them to meet energy codes and can help to achieve green building certifications.

Metal buildings are durable and low-maintenance.

Metal wall panels and roofs are often warrantied by the manufacturer and a recent study determined that metal panels may have a life cycle upwards of 60 years.

Metal buildings can be custom designed.

Depending on a developer’s goals, the steel skin on a metal building can be tailored to fit virtually any stylistic preference, ranging from rustic to high-end aesthetics. The exterior metal sidings can be customized according to an architect’s vision, resembling wood, brick or even bamboo.

The Barlow

Sebastopol, CA

When developer Barney Aldridge purchased a derelict former apple processing facility in Sebastopol, California, with the goal of redeveloping it as a chic outdoor marketplace called The Barlow, he called on designer Thad Geldert to help make his vision a reality.

“I loved the concept of the project and I’ve always been intrigued by blending the history of old buildings with the new,” Geldert says. “It had such great inherent character and the story of it drew me in.”

Geldert got to work on the concept renderings to determine how to seamlessly integrate the six original buildings with 12 new structures that needed to look like they belonged in the agricultural community. That was something that he felt only metal buildings could effortlessly accomplish.

“There’s something timeless and utilitarian about metal buildings,” he says, noting his admiration for architecture that hybridizes rural and contemporary metal designs that are inspired by their natural environments. “They offer an agrarian, industrial aesthetic that fits so well into wine country.”

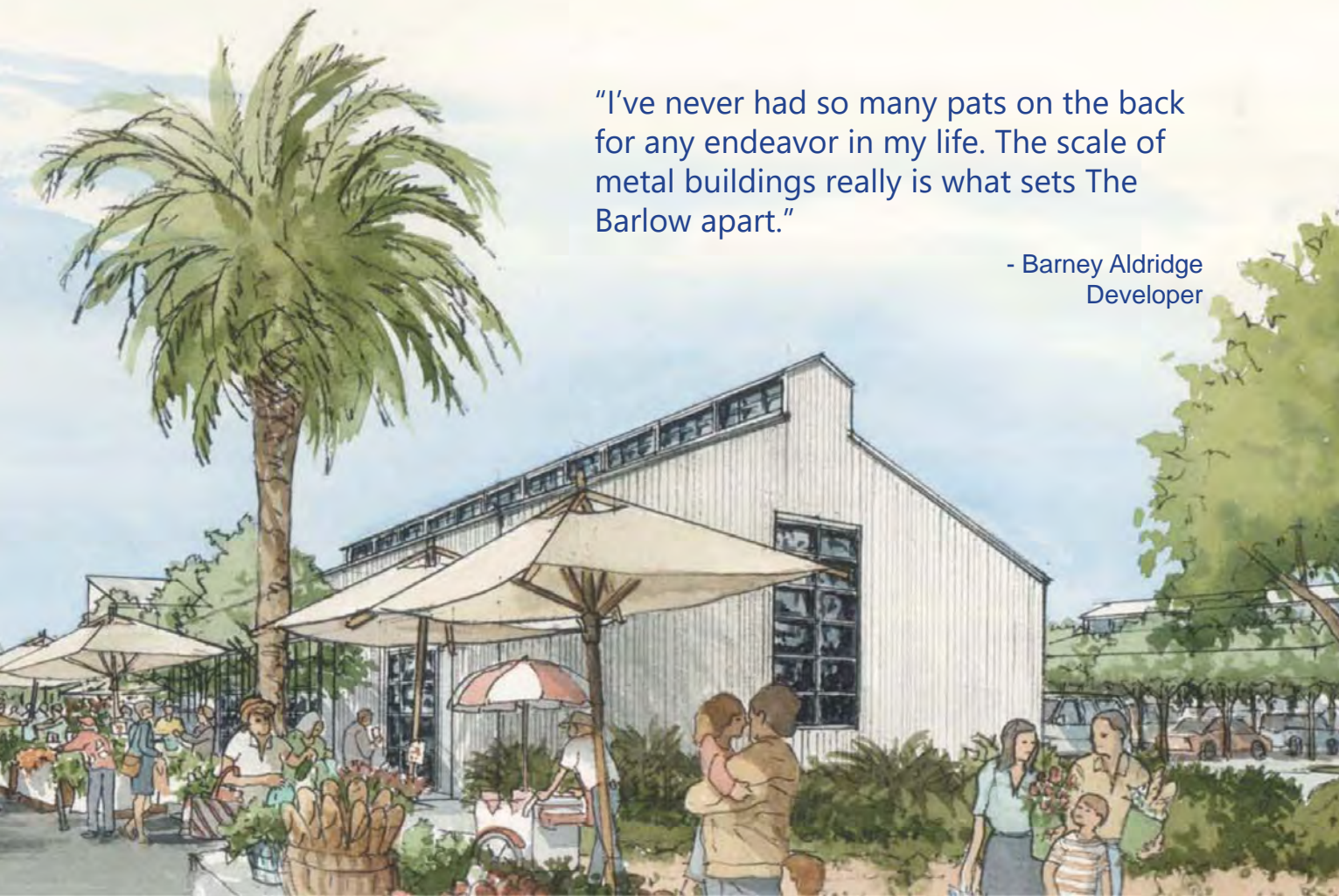


In addition to metal buildings’ more practical benefits, such as their solid structure and cost effectiveness, Geldert points to their long, sweeping, column-free spans that accommodate large-volume industrial and retail spaces, and their flexible layouts that can be reconfigured for retailers and artisans over time.



“I’ve never had so many pats on the back for any endeavor in my life. The scale of metal buildings really is what sets The Barlow apart.”

- Barney Aldridge
Developer



“When we started this project, it was about The Barlow becoming a landing pad for local creatives—whether they were making tamales, cheese or wine—and giving them an outlet,” Geldert says. “For me, that’s what’s beautiful about metal buildings; you’re not restricting the tenants who have different varieties of talent and need different types of spaces in order to create.”

Today, The Barlow is a sprawling 18-building campus that is home to over 30 merchants, creatives and artisans who produce many of their goods on-site. It is a thriving space of creativity and production, offering the community of Sebastopol everything from specialty retail to wine tasting, restaurants, local distilleries, crafts, live music and more.

When asked about his decision to use metal building systems, and whether he would recommend them to those considering building an expansive retail space, Aldridge doesn’t hesitate. “Metal is the preferred method for buildings these days,” he says. “It’s better for the planet, it’s more efficient, the speed of construction is faster and it’s cheaper to build—any way you look at it, it’s all superior.”



Aldridge also stresses that the unique business model has received acclaim from the community and local residents who now have an inviting and open central gathering place, which is a huge draw.

“I’ve never had so many pats on the back for any endeavor in my life,” he says. “The scale of metal buildings really is what sets The Barlow apart. They allow for these high ceilings that make things much more dramatic. Most stores and malls along downtown streets have closed-in ceilings, so to walk into these buildings and see 25-foot ceilings that bring the light into the space is awe-inspiring.”



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Tin City

Paso Robles, CA

Nearly 20 years ago, Tin City owner and developer Mike English bought 25 acres of an industrial park along a historic trail in Paso Robles, California, with the pioneering spirit that believes, “If you build it, they will come.”

Indeed, they did. Today, Tin City has grown from a few metal buildings on the property into a popular, evolving industrial makers market nestled among Paso Robles’ wineries, oaks and olive groves. Its stylish collection of more than 30 metal buildings is where friends, adventurers and aficionados in the area flock to partake in craft wine, beer and spirits—all served up by local artisans.

The name may sound like a nod to times past, but English insists these metal building systems are nothing like the basic sheds and steel that many think of when they envision the early history of metal structures. He explains that Tin City is a play on words, in an effort to combat the typical misperception of the systems.

“Some people have this stereotype that metal buildings are just boxes or something you put out on the farm,” he says. “We’re near the home of Cal Poly San Louis Obispo, the school of architecture, and our region has really honed in on the versatility of these buildings and stepped them up architecturally so that they’re not only practical, but they’re stunning as well.”

For English, metal buildings enabled his site to expand over the years—sometimes very quickly when needed—in order to accommodate his rapidly growing development.

“If you get your ducks in a row, it’s the fastest method of construction there is,” he says. “You aren’t waiting on different trades like masonry to get their part done. The entire building goes up and you’re on your way.”

The Village

Reno, NV



Brett McElhane, president of steel supplier American Innovative Structures, has committed his career to opening up peoples' minds to the enormous potential of metal building systems. When he received a call from a general contractor asking if a metal building system would be a feasible solution for an upscale boutique commercial community in Reno, Nevada, he couldn't wait to take it on.

"A high-end project like this is different than what would normally come to mind when people think of metal buildings," he says. "But these are exactly the projects we take on and what we do; we're trying to educate architects and developers on the front end and explain that these structures are limited only by the imagination."

Thus, when McElhane and his team carried out the structural engineering, design and erection of eight metal building structures for the 12-acre development called The Village at Rancharrah, they had no doubt that the systems would be capable of achieving the Napa Valley farmhouse design aesthetic that the architect envisioned.

The Village is a commercial community that offers a unique blend of shops, dining options and specialty markets with views of the iconic Harrah mansion. It was built as a space to accommodate seasonal events, activities, farmers markets, music and art for nearby residents.

“One of the key points that we always hit on is that you can truly skin this any way,” McElhaney says. “Most people envision these industrial buildings with just a metal siding on it, but we can create a stucco look with stone adhered to them so they don’t have to look like traditional metal buildings. We can skin these just about any way an architect can dream up.”

For Matthew Allen, the senior project manager at American Innovative Structures, a key benefit of metal buildings is that the unique design-build process allows for quick erection that can save developers time and money.

“With these buildings, you put all the planning and forethought into the design of it, and then it

basically comes out like a Lego set,” he says. “They go up so easily because we’re able to use a 3D modeling program to create the infrastructure and the architect can then place it into their own modeling to anticipate any issues before you even go out to build.”

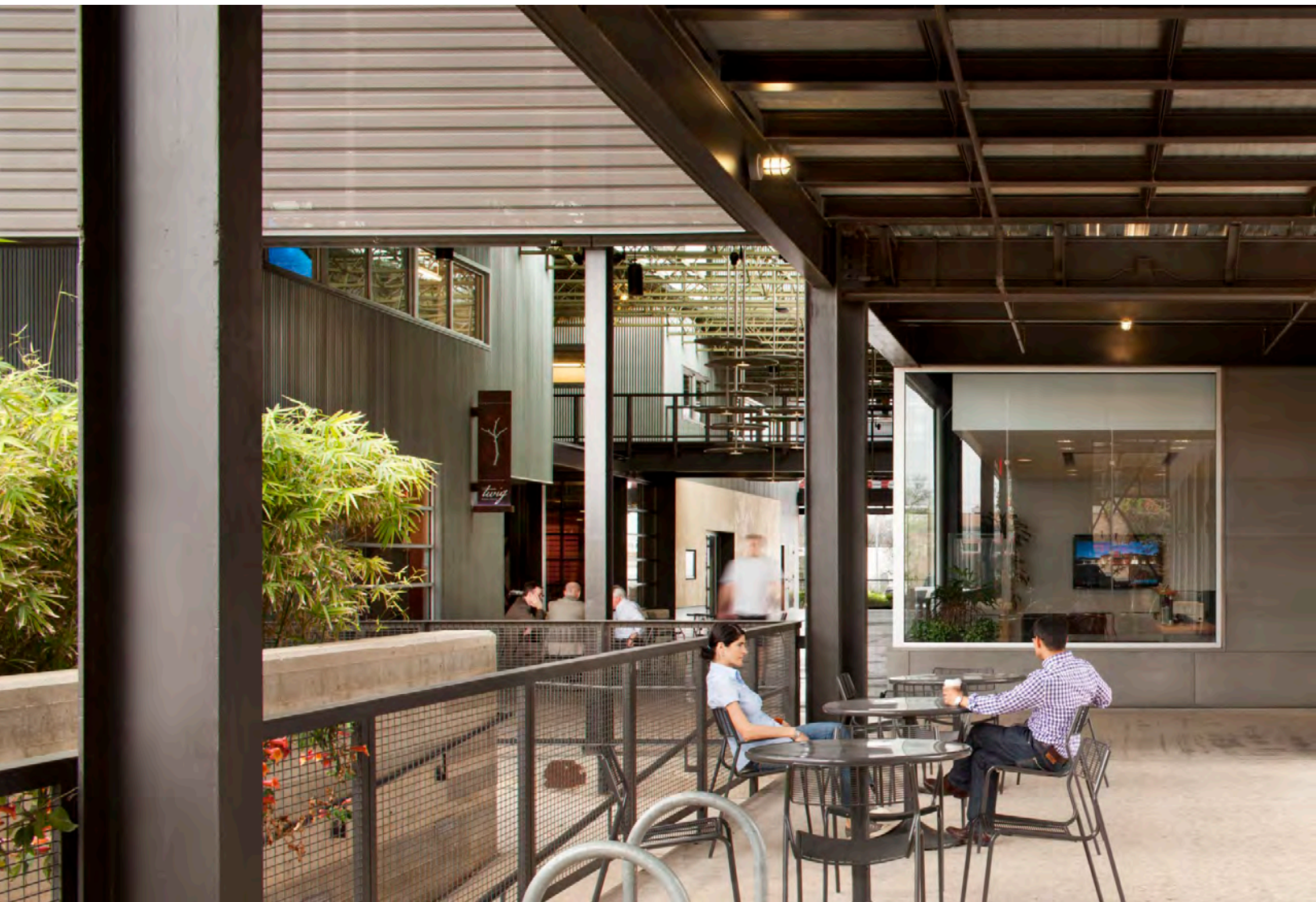
That approach is much more cost-effective than making mistakes out in the field. It also doesn’t hurt that the building system looks great, Allen adds.

“Right now, people are really loving that modern metal look, but the beauty of these systems is that there are these nice ways to make them elegant and high-end versus purely industrial,” he says.

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**- Brett McElhaney
President, American
Innovative Structures**





Full Goods

San Antonio, TX

When prestigious architecture firm Lake|Flato was commissioned to develop an innovative master plan to redesign the Full Goods Warehouse at the historic Pearl Brewery complex in San Antonio, Texas, its architects turned to metal buildings as the system of choice.

“Our overarching goal with this adaptive reuse project was to turn this urban space into an incubator for activity and ideas for the neighborhood,” says Lake|Flato architect Todd Wascher. “Because the original nature of the building was metal, it made sense to use steel structures that lend themselves to the philosophy of the project. It was an industrial brewery site and so we wanted to bring a certain level of grit to it so it felt authentic. Recapturing that history was important.”

To accomplish the project, the original structure of the warehouse was preserved, but it was made more efficient with the addition of a second story. That mezzanine level was made using steel systems and metal panels in an effort to blend the old and the new into an extensive, flexible space.

What resulted was a transformation into a self-sufficient, mixed-use “village” that now houses restaurants, retail, nonprofits and local businesses while emphasizing community, conservation and local economic development. The complex pivots around shaded exterior community gathering places.

The building is naturally lit and cooled by large fans and breezeways that take advantage of San Antonio’s temperate climate. The other benefit of metal building systems, Wascher notes, is that the use of steel reflects a commitment to sustainability.

“From an emissions standpoint, concrete has a huge carbon footprint and releases massive amounts of carbon dioxide in the air,” he says. “Steel, on the other hand, is 100% recyclable, which kept with the theme of environmental excellence with this project.”

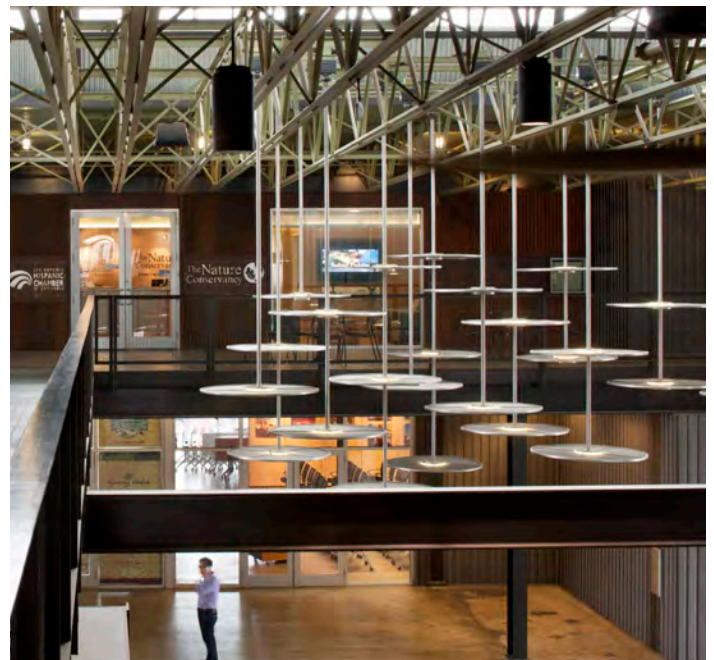
That commitment led the project to be LEED Gold certified for its sustainable site development, water conservation, energy efficiency, materials selections and indoor environmental quality.

Ultimately, Wascher says there’s an array of benefits to using metal buildings, but from an architect’s perspective, he sees unique beauty in the structures beyond their utilitarian characteristics.

“I just love being able to use metal buildings because they’re so beautiful,” he concludes. “I’ve done a number of designs with them because they provide that grit that is cool and they relate well to so many different types of uses and environments.”

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*-Todd Wascher, AIA, LEED AP BD+C
Associate Partner, Lake|Flato Architects*





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