

**ULI Chicago 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Vision Awards  
July 10, 2019**



**Project Finalist: Optimo Hat Company**

**Project Team:**

Owner: Optimo

Architecture Firm: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, LLP

**Project Description:**

Founded in 1991 in the historic neighborhood of Beverly, Optimo is a leading maker of handmade hats that have generated a global cult following. Located at the neighborhood's "gateway," Optimo's new, LEED Silver headquarters and workshop centralizes operations inside a 100-year old decommissioned firehouse, enabling an expansion of Optimo's production capabilities by a factor of 10 and reinforcing the company's commitment to local hiring and training on Chicago's south side.

Optimo is an adaptive reuse project that preserves the character of the old firehouse building and its integration with the historic fabric of Beverly, while also diverting a significant volume of materials from the waste stream. The building earned LEED ID+C Silver certification in Commercial Interiors for its strategies in development density, community connectivity, water efficiency, lighting and energy optimization, and overall design innovation. Interior architectural surfaces use durable, long-lasting, inherently inert materials, including blackened steel, walnut and cork, to improve the indoor environmental quality and express a contemporary industrial aesthetic. The building also preserves elements of the original firehouse, including the original brick exterior and "City of Chicago Fire Department" bronze plaque, a kitchen finished with marble repurposed from the original firehouse showers, and porthole windows, set flush on the second floor, infill existing firepole openings.

At 7,700 square feet, the existing building afforded Optimo's operations to be distributed between three floors, with the first floor dedicated to manufacturing, the second floor converted into a design studio and offices, and a basement serving as a staging ground for the company's raw products.

Due to the stripping of all usable plumbing and electric systems in 2008, the design team was able to implement modern mechanical configurations into the firehouse, putting sustainability at the forefront while maintaining the integrity of the historic building. Generous daylighting reduces connected lighting power by 71.95%, while Optimo's collaboration with the city to plant trees along the east side of the building reduces the cooling load. Supporting an efficient and collaborative workflow, the design organizes the manufacturing equipment and distribution of the electrical, steam, and compressed air lines to maximize productivity and promote a healthy workspace specializing in historic craftsmanship.

Optimo's products are designed and manufactured based on historic craftsmanship practices, with the manufacturing floor incorporating all original and preserved hat-making equipment, some more than 100 years old. The design of the first-floor workflow is built around the function and demands of the equipment and finished in a low-VOC matte-black powder coat for a uniform finish.

Now fully restored, the Optimo headquarters and workshop forms a connection with the South Side Chicago community of Beverly. Safe bike lanes, commuter rail and bus lines, and high walkability form strong community connectivity for Optimo and its location at the de facto "gateway" to Beverly.