

AO DESIGNS A DIVERSIFIED PIPELINE

HEALTHCARE, RENTALS & MORE FROM ORANGE-BASED FIRM

By Katie Murar | August 29, 2022



Solis Park & The Cave Community Center; Irvine, CA



Broadstone Atlas at Park & Paseo; Santa Ana, CA

One of Orange County's largest architecture firms has plans to get even larger.

Despite its already diversified portfolio, Orange-based **AO** is ramping up service lines and expanding into new markets, especially those it considers "recession proof."

"We are constantly expanding into new growth areas, and diversifying to maintain AO as a legacy firm," Managing Partner **Rob Budetti** told the Business Journal.

The firm, which ranks No. 2 on the Business Journal's list of top architectural firms with \$73.6 million in annual OC billings—up 17% year-over-year—has several notable projects in the works locally, including at **Five Point Holding LLC**'s Great Park Neighborhoods in Irvine and at the **Lakeshore** office complex elsewhere in the city (see profiles, this page and page 29).

Healthcare Expansion

Like several other real estate-focused companies, AO is placing an emphasis on the healthcare sector. It expanded its service lines to healthcare during the pandemic and is eyeing more ways to service the industry.

"There's plenty of demand, especially as providers look to move surgeries out of hospitals" and into ambulatory surgery centers or outpatient centers, Budetti said. "We're looking to solidify our foothold in certain submarkets of the healthcare industry."

Rental Push

Multifamily, unsurprisingly, marks another hot market for AO.

"We have high hopes for the sector, mainly because of the housing shortage," Budetti said. "The rental market is not slowing down."

AO is growing internally to match its external expansion, with 50 employees hired year-to-date, upping its headcount 18% to 330 companywide. Its OC employee base climbed 6.9% to 293.

“Finding employees is our biggest challenge right now,” Budetti said, adding the firm has implemented a more flexible office work schedule to keep up with competitors.

“We lost some employees during the pandemic to firms that offered that flexibility, so we’re adapting,” Budetti said.

The firm also recently brought on a full-time director of people, a position that focuses on hiring, retention and resources to help employees move up within the firm.

“It’s about staff development—there previously wasn’t a clear path for moving people up, so the role focuses on the needs of our staff, making sure they’re taken care of, and can grow within the company,” Budetti said.

Solis Park, Irvine

At the **Great Park Neighborhoods** in Irvine, **AO** has been tapped to head up various mixed-use components of Solis Park, the mega-project’s newest community. Model homes at the 849-home community opened last month, with the remaining neighborhoods to open through September.

AO’s work at the park includes an entertainment area dubbed the Cave, pool restrooms, storage and trash enclosures, geodome skylights and shade structures throughout the park.

The pool area has interiors that mimic caves inspired from the new Lascaux IV cave art museum in Montignac, France. AO will also be involved in designing the next community at Great Park Neighborhoods, currently called District 5-South.

Park & Paseo, Santa Ana

AO is continuing its work with developer **Alliance Residential** in Santa Ana at the **Park & Paseo** mixed-use development along Red Hill Avenue, which will total 1,221 units, 18,000 square feet of retail space and 56,000 square feet of office space.

It took the wraps off **Broadstone Archive** last year, the second of three planned multifamily projects to open at Park & Paseo, and it is now preparing to debut **Broadstone Atlas**, the third and final phase.

The mixed-use, five-story building counts 483 units ranging from studios to three-bedroom apartments. Among the more unique amenities at Atlas is a podcast studio, intended to draw in residents attracted to the burgeoning media sector.

“We are trying to be more creative with our amenities and stay ahead of the curve,” AO Managing Partner **Rob Budetti** told the Business Journal, adding that interesting food and beverage concepts are always top of mind additions to multifamily projects, such as speakeasies and beer gardens.

Bosscat Kitchen & Libations and Ten Sushi + Cocktail Bar, Irvine

AO was tapped to lead the design of two new restaurants from **Daily Dose Hospitality** at Irvine’s Lakeshore business park near the airport: **Bosscat Kitchen and Libations** and **Ten Sushi + Cocktail Bar**. The two restaurants—owned by co-founders and restaurant operators **Leslie Nguyen** and **JT Reed**—were newly constructed at the 900,000-square-foot office campus after relocating from Saunders Plaza in Newport Beach, which is headed for a mixed-use redevelopment early next year. Both opened this month.

Bosscat Kitchen counts 5,000 square feet with an additional 1,200 square feet outdoors shared between a patio and bar, larger than its previous spot according to officials. Ten Sushi occupies 2,800 square feet with a patio included.

Bosscat’s design “focuses on the brand’s evolution, keeping the same original Bosscat grit but framed in a more sophisticated way,” AO said. “Building on the brand’s essential specialty of exclusive whisky offerings, the open bar creates a seamless connection between indoor and outdoor dining, while the whisky library and private whisky room provide an upscale setting.”

The design for Ten Asian Bistro, meanwhile, was intended to create “an alluring and inviting nightlife scene, emphasizing feminine appeal. AO worked with the client to add young and vibrant energy to the brand’s clean and simple Zen vibe.”

Hoag Monarch Urgent Care, Dana Point

AO has inked a master agreement with **Hoag** to design facilities for the firm in Orange County, including a new urgent care building. One facility is in Monarch Beach at 24060 Camino Del Camino Del Avion, the former location of Laguna Dana Urgent Care.

The building was redesigned this year into **Hoag Monarch Urgent Care**, “a classic and refined medical space with a surf motif that stands out from typical designs in the healthcare space,” **AO** said.