

CLIENT SPOTLIGHT: HELIX ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

In the gritty Crossroads district of downtown Kansas City, red brick buildings contrast with the sleek glass-faced sky-rises of central downtown. Vintage painted advertisements still make their mark. Restaurants, lofts, and businesses abound, filling up a once-vacant neighborhood that now thrives in its cowtown feel.

It's where we call home in Kansas City, in the third floor of a three-story building that boasts exposed brick walls, hardwood floors, industrial fixtures, and a sushi restaurant on the bottom floor. And within walking distance of us is one of our clients, [Helix Architecture + Design](#); in fact, they're one block east. At 5'3", if I stand on my tiptoes and look out our back window, I can see the [solar panels Brightergy installed](#), at home on top of its two-story building.



The view from the solar panel installation on the rooftop of Helix Architecture and Design, with the Kauffman Center, the Crossroads Arts District, and the Brightergy offices in view.

Inside Helix, whose building bones resemble ours, it's clear it houses architects and interior designers who believe in holistic, integrated design. A polished open-floor plan gives way to a serene floating staircase and a company living room on the first floor, complete with [a fireplace](#): Helix's

trademark feature, a gathering place for thoughtful minds. Helix places a focus on human experience and sustainability; they currently claim four LEED Gold projects to their name – the most of any architecture firm in the metro, and a number that’s ready to grow with three more anticipated projects to date.

A Shift in Perspective: From Building Renter to Building Owner

They’re also a firm that has undergone a transformation of sorts this year, as they transitioned from renters to building owners. According to principal Michael Heule, it’s been an experience that has give them a “firsthand chance to work with vendors from a very different perspective {they’re} getting to see what contractors are going through, what [their] clients go through.”

When it came to making changes to their building, solar was the first investment they made following their purchase. Heule says, “it was sort of a no brainer for us.” While Helix has purchased RECS for years – offsetting 100% of their energy consumption – “it’s tough to reduce your own electrical load. Solar – it’s easy, tangible, it sits on the roof where you can see it. Looking at the costs now and looking at the anticipated savings, after 5 years, it’s money in your pocket.”

Simplifying the Solar Installation Process

And “Brightergy really made it simple to understand,” Heule adds. He was recommended to Brightergy by shared clients – like Lankford & Associates – and had attended several solar seminars in the past. When it came down to it though, he says, nobody else had comparable solar experience, and by floating the rebates and handling all the paperwork, we made it extremely easy to [go solar](#).

Beyond the savings in energy costs, their solar installation also represents “a chance to do our own research,” says Heule. “Being in the [sustainable building] industry, it’s important that we demonstrate that leadership, demonstrate to clients our own sustainable efforts. It was an easy business decision.” They’ll use their own solar installation and the impending savings in energy costs as a “test bed for clients” – along with other sustainable initiatives in the works.

Building a Sustainable Business

As 2012 participants in MARC's Green Commute Challenge, Helix has taken first place so far in the small business category, by utilizing an "online commute tracking system that encourages carpooling, walking, biking, etc." And they've also developed their building as a Case Study with Henderson Engineering – an effort that will look at the process of retrofitting an existing structure to reach net zero.

Which fits in perfectly with what Helix is about. While they also build new, they define sustainability as "the capacity to endure," and Heule says that "all of [their] projects feature a review of sustainability. Whether or not the client is interested in going after LEED Gold, we're still going to look at a project from a sustainability lens – look at what's good for the client, the community, and the structure." That includes building within existing structures, and now, outfitting their own existing building's increasing sustainability – something Brightergy is proud to be a part of.

Sustainable Building Tips

As far as green building initiatives we all can take – whether we rent or own – Helix is full of useful tips. Prior to building ownership, they had taken other measures to make their building more energy efficient and sustainable: they've installed insulated glass in exterior windows, and are in the process of switching all of their light bulbs from incandescent to LED. Prior to installing solar, they covered their roof with a white, Energy Star coating in order to cool their building more efficiently, as well as put something down that will last longer than five years.

Source: <http://brightergy.com/media/blog/client-spotlight-helix-architecture-design/>