

# Patricia Saldana Natke

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CHICAGO BUSINESS

Patricia Saldana Natke's firm, Urban Works Ltd., is happy to take on big commercial projects—it worked on remodeling interiors at the 900 North Michigan Shops for JMB Realty Corp.—but it doesn't aggressively seek out such work.

Instead, the firm's 15 employees spend the bulk of their time designing buildings and creating plans to guide development in neighborhoods outside of downtown.

"The heart of the city is the downtown area. There's no question. But the soul of the city is within the neighborhoods," says Ms. Natke, 49, founding partner of Urban Works. "The neighborhoods have been neglected in most of

the planning exercises, and how many great buildings they have."

But it's a tough environment for winning assignments. Nonprofits looking for design services often invite 15 to 20 firms to bid, versus the half-dozen that was typical years ago, she says.

"She does really exceptional work on very stringent budgets," says Carol Ross Barney, president of Ross Barney Architects Inc. in Chicago, where Ms. Natke worked at the outset of her career.

"There are very few companies doing as well as she does."

For a group called the Resurrection Project, the firm designed the \$12 million La Casa Dormitories, a six-story building in Pilsen that

provides students from area colleges a place to live outside of home during their studies. Urban Works also led a Chicago Housing Authority-sponsored team that published a master

plan for 70 acres between Chicago and North avenues and Halsted and Orleans streets, with recommendations for reformatting local streets to site future retail and residential projects.

"The architect has to not just be at their desk designing," Ms. Natke says. "We need them to be out there in the neighborhoods to connect with people."



JOHN R. BOEHM

Urban Works Ltd. founding partner Patricia Saldana Natke in La Casa Dormitories