The aftermath of the 1995 Kobe earthquake is still visible in the city, which lost more than 6,000 casualties and caused USD 100 billion in damage. More than fifteen years later, a number of buildings that were constructed quickly after the incident now require extensive renovation.

The aim of this project is to upgrade an existing concrete structure using simple means. In five steps, the interior and immediate surroundings of the building shall be improved. The starting point is a series of interior works which convert the ground floor into a retail facility. The last step consists of outdoor gardens and extensively vegetated exterior structures forming an ameliorated urban space.

In addition, structural components fabricated from recycled timber are blended with the previous building elements.

The jury acknowledges the well-detailed concept that makes use of extremely simple devices. The original concrete structure – is a determining element of the project’s concept. Through this connection, the structure becomes a positive symbol of the community. The use of recycled timber components is exemplary.

Comment of the Holcim Awards jury Asia Pacific

The project demonstrates a proficient alternative methodology for site conversion. The means are simple and low-tech but innovative in terms of the result and process of realization.

In addition, structural components fabricated from recycled timber are blended with the previous building elements.

Innovation and transferability – Progress

Re-using existing buildings and structures is an approach with universal validity and applicability in many locations. This project demonstrates a proficient alternative methodology for site conversion. The means are simple and low-tech but innovative in terms of the result and process of realization. In combination with the following elementary steps for implementation, this makes the concept easy to transfer:

- renovation and reaction of the ground floor shop
- creation of bicycle parking
- transformation of the asphalt parking area into a vegetable garden
- renovation of the stairwell to improve interior to exterior connection
- vegetating the façade

Ethical standards and social equity – People

The project will first of all affect the immediate, but also the larger surrounding; it is expected to act as a catalyst for a wave of improvement of the urban landscape. By this, it is not only an architectural intervention, but also an urban development component that will contribute to the local community. The opening of a shop will help revitalize the public space on street level. The garden and green façade provide not only an ecological but also a visual improvement that is accessible and beneficial for all members of the community.

Environmental quality and resource efficiency – Planet

Three major points determine the aim of this project:

1) creating interior space with re-used materials: building materials used to redesign the interior are sourced from a timber mill within walking distance of the site, and operated by the owner of the project premises. The detailing of the interior design leverages the available timber products and diversion of materials otherwise rendered as waste.
2) creating spaces by self-made construction where possible: “do-it-yourself” construction calls for materials, tools and products manageable in human scale. The use of small-scale components is made possible through the occupation of existing spaces and helps to reduce energetic resource and effort to minimum.
3) bringing nature into the city: creating a vegetable garden on the former parking lot and integrating a living wall into the façade turns the project into a green oasis within rather lithic surroundings.

Economic performance and compatibility – Prosperity

Through the use of discarded materials, the simple means of implementation and large extent of do-it-yourself assembly, the monetary effort remains very low. Since aesthetics are an important factor in livability, the project will contribute at a larger scale to the prosperity of the surroundings through the amelioration of the built environment one by one hand and by the visualization of the streetscape.

All in all, the project can be seen as a positive starting point from which highly adapted ideas will propagate.

Contextual and aesthetic impact – Proficiency

The transformation of the building and its surrounding aims to respect the found and existing character of the place. Based upon its social and functional history, the site will be transformed into an effective and beautiful space. The small-scale interventions, that are realized step-by-step, allow a smooth conversion and evolution of the place with a constant improvement.