



Participatory renovation is a small and often unheard-of niche in the world of design and construction. Rather than attempt to widen this narrow pipeline of potential clients, we choose to further specialize by prioritizing work in our city of Ichikawa, a Tokyo exurb of 490,000 people, 20 km to the east of Tokyo's center. The decision to focus our projects on this specific locality has had the unique effect of maximizing the impact of our work in a single area, creating the opportunity for unexpected interconnections between clients to occur. We believe that every participatory architectural project we undertake is a chance to strengthen a growing network of small business-owners, entrepreneurs and homeowners in Ichikawa, and that this process is integral to the bottom-up urban revitalization we want to see in our city. We made our home in Ichikawa in 2010, and by centering the scope of our work on our adopted home town, we have been able to actively and joyfully engage with our city in surprising and exciting ways.

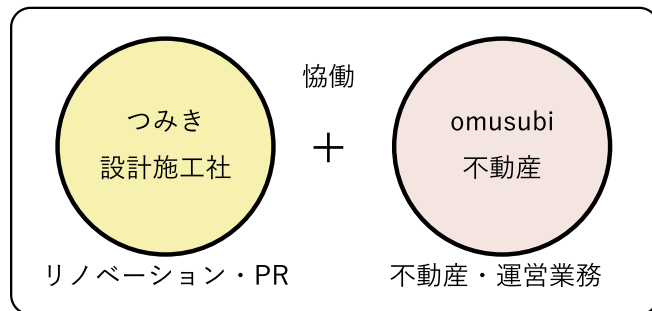
By definition, our renovation clients are in a moment of transition, engaged in an aesthetic, financial and social transformation. We help our clients to connect with our network of Tsumiki “alumni” and supporters during this pivotal time, and often participate in the curation of public events that celebrate the opening of their newly refurbished space. These events are essential to our mission of spreading the seed of the do-it-yourself / do-it-together process to others in our city. They result in new collaborations and opportunities that help lay the path for our future work.



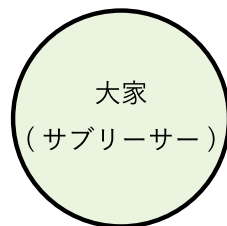
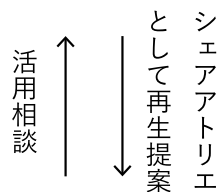
*The kickoff event for our client Kura Gallery - a bread & sake pairing party held in collaboration with the restauraters of 47 Cafe, one of our previous clients.*

Due to the aging population and the particulars of the Japanese real estate market, 14 percent of all houses are vacant in Japan. Given that our city has operated as a bedroom community (or “bed town”) for Tokyo workers, properties outside of a very small radius from a train station often fall into disuse for long periods of time. In 2015, the owner of a vacant apartment building contacted our friends at Omusibi Real Estate, a unique company with a similar mission to ours - to transform their city from a “bed town” to a “home town”. Omusibi got in touch with us, and we then called our friend and community organizer Seiya Minato, who runs a longstanding bicycle shop that sells handmade goods made by local craftspeople. Together, we developed a venture in which Tsumiki would transform the building into a commercial space, and we would put the call out to sole-proprietor business who might jump at the chance to participate in the design and build-out of their first ateliers.





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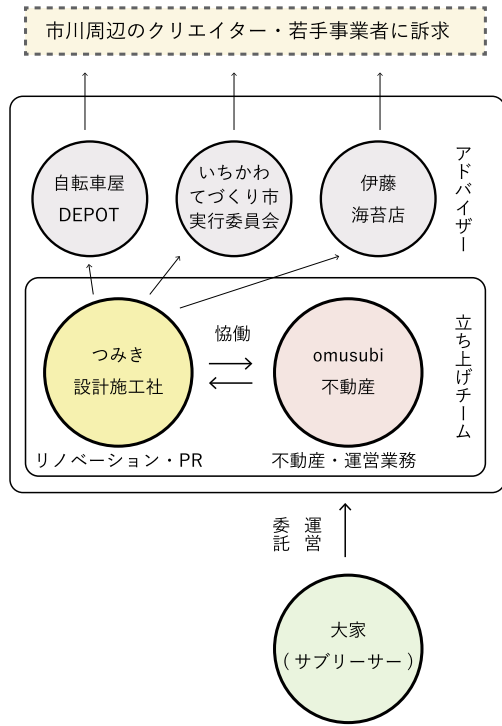


We held a party in the raw, unimproved building and, through this, 10 new tenants emerged, their imaginations running wild at what they might do with their own spaces. As a vote of confidence in the success of the endeavor, Tsumiki became an anchor tenant, renting a small space on the first floor for ourselves. This project, called the 123 Building, is now home to a fabric atelier, a massage studio, a design office, an antiques shop, a bakery, a bicycle framebuilder, and a ceramicist. At that time, the 123 Building was the only “shared atelier” property in Ichikawa.

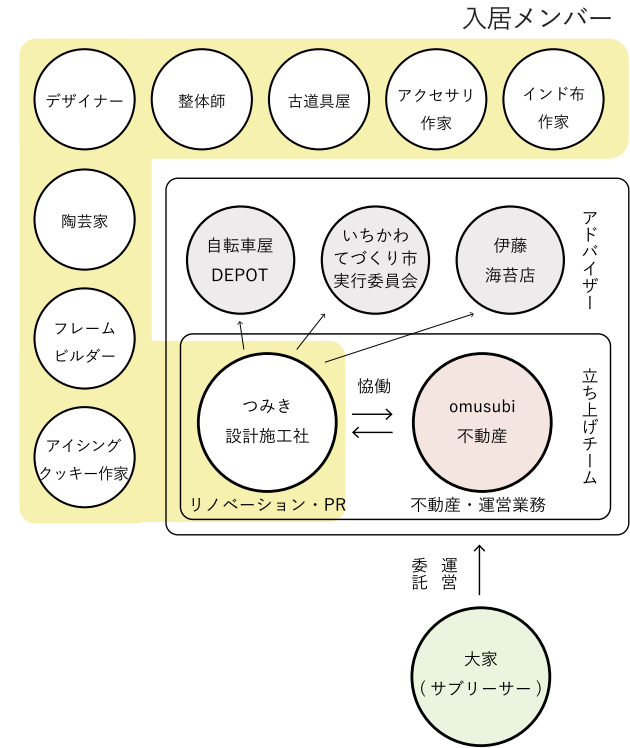
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Our intention behind this project was to create local business opportunities for two hypothetical archetypes: the artist/craftsperson who wants a space other than their house to conduct their work, and the Ichikawa-dwelling businessperson who reluctantly commutes to Tokyo to do their business, under the belief that it is a necessity for their success. We set out to prove the concept that these kind of small business-owners can set up shop and thrive in their own city, and to propagate the mindset that Ichikawa is a place with an abundance of opportunity.



*The kickoff party of the 123 Building.*



*Renovated studios.*



In the 1990s, Ichikawa was a renowned spot on the map of the Japanese jazz scene, a place where young musicians could hone their skills and find their big break. However, 15 years ago, the owner of the last dedicated live jazz house passed away, putting an end to an era. We were contacted by the former student of one of Japan's most famous jazz musicians, who wanted to establish a new club in the memory of his teacher. His property is in the basement of a high rise apartment building, and we felt that special care needed to be taken to assuage the concerns of the tenants above that the new club wouldn't pose as a nuisance to the building.







After completing the primary sound-insulation work together with our client, we held an “under construction” jazz concert while the club was still unpainted and unfinished. We invited the tenants of the apartment building to join us for this concert with the club in a humble state - still a work in progress - to create good will in the hopes that they would root for the success of this new cultural institution underneath them. We also used the event to prove the quality of the soundproofing work, which rendered the music inaudible to the units above.





We've helped plan and promote the opening event for many of our clients, and are consistently surprised at how exuberantly the Tsumiki network rallies around the inauguration of a new business. The participatory renovation process instills in the minds of our clients the amount of work and care that goes into the launch of a new space, and they show their appreciation for this through their enthusiastic patronage of the subsequent businesses we work with. This culture of reciprocity has resulted in numerous small instances of "paying it forward" - acts of generosity that increase the intangible but palpable quantity of trust between members of a community that we believe results in the long-term resilience of a city.



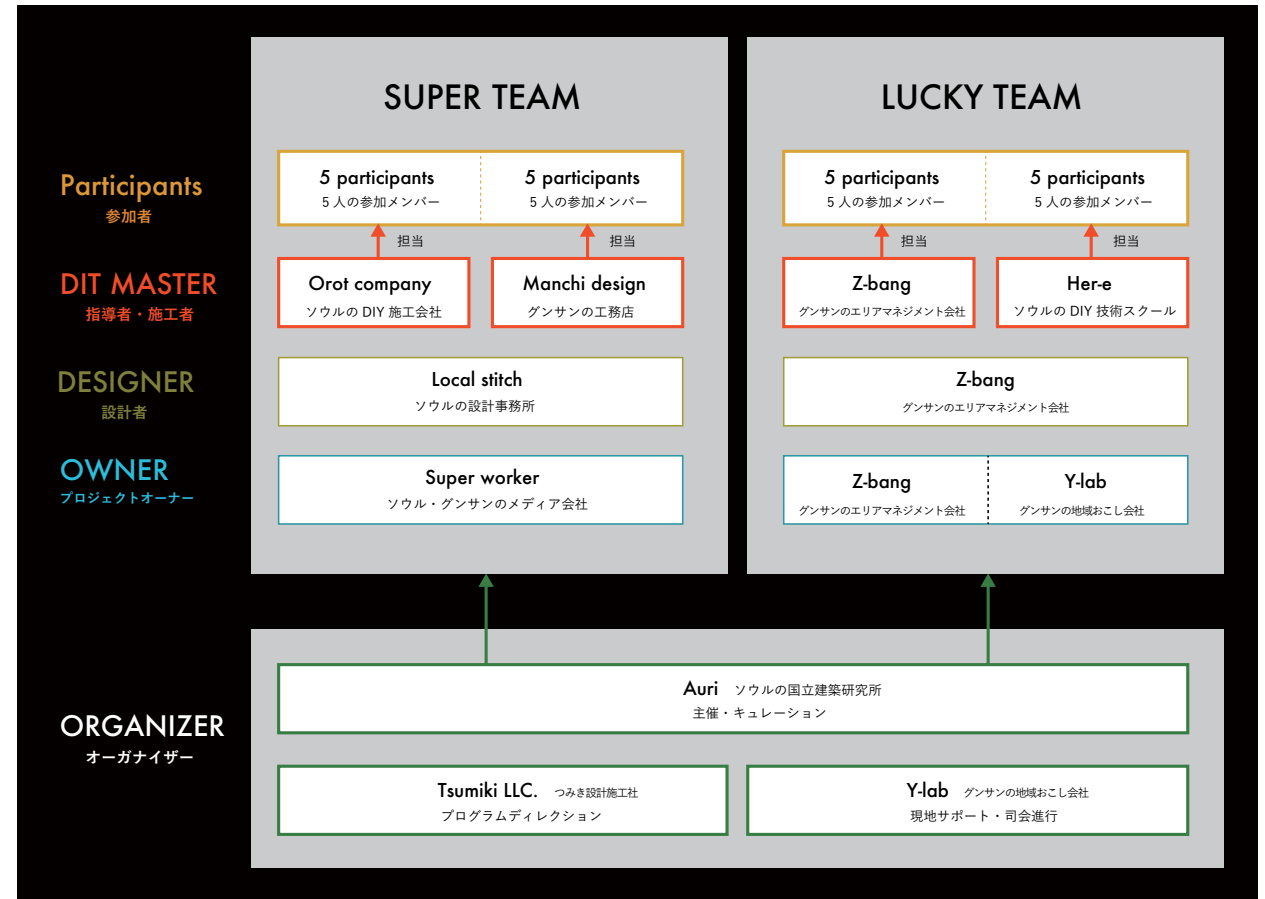


Following the publication of our book “Making Together”, we’ve had the opportunity to facilitate DIT workshops outside of Japan, working in a new cultural context with craftspeople we’ve never collaborated with before. Our most recent international workshop was held in Gungsan, Korea, hosted by the Architecture & Urban Research Institute. Through this workshop, we’ve refined our framework for the sharing of knowledge between workshop participants, expert craftspeople, designers and property owners, while keeping on track for the timely completion of a project. To make this workshop successful, each stakeholder has to expand outside of their comfort zone and open their process to participation from others in new and potentially challenging ways.



As organizer and facilitator, we bring a quantity of technical, social and embodied knowledge. Our role requires us to understand, among other things:

- the different speeds of labor for skilled and unskilled workers
- the scope of the skill-set of a DIY'er vs. that of a professional
- common challenges that professional artisans vface when trying to share their expertise for the first time
- how to manage a construction site so that the presence of unskilled workers doesn't slow progress to a crawl
- a set of ergonomic "best practices" that allow small-bodied new builders to use the same tools wielded by stronger, more skilled carpenters they are working alongside
- how to communicate design and construction information effectively and directly in a new cultural context, and across several different roles (owners, designers, expert laborers, workshop participants)





Within the model of our practice, international workshops are located on the advancing edge of a widening circle, at the center of which will always be the enrichment of our hometown of Ichikawa. Consistent work within our city has borne many fruits for us: friendships, partnerships, as well as a practical understanding of how, as architects, we can participate in a feedback loop that results in the strengthening of bonds between people in a city. Facilitating workshops outside of Japan give us the opportunity to share our particular skill-set with other cities, watching with joy as the revitalization processes we've become familiar with bear fruit in new contexts.