TOP 40 UNDER 40 BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS

Emerging developers, brokers, lawyers and public officials who are helping to shape San Diego’s future.
Pennington’s belief is that “an activated, animated, thriving open space” will add value and energy to a project such as Makers Quarter, the six-block planned neighborhood in the East Village of downtown San Diego. That hypothesis led her to devise the community event venue called Silo with the goal of using a vacant dirt lot to test ideas with the community.

“The ideas that work will shape the future. The ones that don’t, we learn from,” Pennington said. In 2013, she, local artist Christopher Konecki and others transformed what she calls “a cool and funky warehouse” at the site into a pop-up art installation. Word traveled fast. The night after the launch party, 1,500 people showed up to see for themselves. “Huge note to self: There’s an unmet demand for connectivity between the public and the art world,” Pennington said.

So when the next phase of Makers Quarter breaks ground this summer and the planned high-rise building takes shape, a part of it will be an outgrowth of the Silo experiment. “There will be a six-story public art installation to carry on Silo’s legacy,” Pennington said. “There are people who care about art and culture in this neighborhood, and we are working for them.”

Overall, the 2.5 million-square-foot development will become a mixed-use district that Pennington describes as a dense and sustainable urban space to foster a healthy, walkable lifestyle for residents. A community garden experiment proved so successful that she’s determined to design it into the master plan, perhaps on a rooftop, she said. “It became an educational hub for underprivileged youth, and we definitely want to keep it here,” she said.

Pennington has a master’s degree in urban planning from Harvard University Graduate School of Design and a visionary’s idea of transformative development. “You can have a two-hour presentation with a drawing board, or you can have a conversation with the community on engagement, testing ideas,” she said. “I like the second approach.”

— John Roemer