

# THE ARCHITECTS NEWSPAPER

PIANO'S SUBURBAN DREAM

## Renzo Piano aims to revitalize a suburban shopping mall in Northern California

By ANTONIO PACHECO • November 4, 2016



For the last several years, [Renzo Piano Building Workshop](#) (RPBW) has been quietly working in the [Northern California](#) city of San Ramon on a scheme that aims to reinvent the suburban shopping mall as a new kind urban typology. The project, City Center Bishop Ranch, would create a new interpretation of the shopping mall in an affluent suburb located a 35-mile drive away from [San Francisco](#) by transforming it into a cultural and entertainment destination. The resulting 15-acre, 300,000-square foot shopping, dining, and entertainment district aims to become a new locus of intergenerational public interaction that, according to RPBW, is inherently missing from many suburban areas.

The scheme attempts to subvert normative and typically linear New Urbanist-inspired main street revitalization approaches—streets that go “from nowhere to nowhere,” according to the project’s website—by creating a loop of porous

commercial and social spaces on a large, planted site. RPBW argues that “main street” schemes typically push the functional aspects of commercial corridors like loading docks and parking structures away from storefront-activated street fronts, creating an impenetrable wall around these developments that stifles their integration into surrounding areas. RPBW’s response is a porous, pedestrianized [mixed-use](#) area with “no back doors” bounded by a porous perimeter that absorbs surrounding traffic, concealing automobiles into overhead parking garages.

As such, renderings for the project depict a complex of three-story structures surrounded by leafy open space. The mall, carved into a cluster of buildings surrounding a central, open square, features glass-clad facades along ground floor areas, while second floor and third floor uses are wrapped in sheets of folded metal panels designed to deflect rays of the sun at specific angles. The project is currently under construction and to be completed in 2018.

For more information on City Center Bishop Ranch, see the project [website](#).