



# A NEW NEST FOR TECHIES

**CTRL Collective puts a fresh spin on the trend of coworking spaces.**

BY NOELA HUESO

**S**ome say it was the 2008 recession and the rise of unemployment that followed. Others say it's the portable technology that allows work to be done from anywhere. Still others point to the thriving entrepreneurial spirit among millennials and their passion for innovation and collaboration. Whatever the reason, the rise of the "gig" economy, a labor market defined by short-term contract or freelance work rather than permanent positions, has led to a different way of working for many people, particularly those between 18 and 45, in the fields of technology, media, design and the arts. It has also led to the proliferation of what are called coworking spaces — where a couch, desk, office or conference room can be rented, according to one's needs, by the day, week or month.

What's different about these recent players in the field — Regus, a more traditional temporary office model with facilities around the world, has catered to traveling executives since 1989 — is their emphasis on creativity and collaboration among tenants, who may start off sharing a workspace as strangers but end up as business partners. The look of these so-called creative campus environments, which typically feature large,

artsy, relaxed communal spaces alongside more private offices, is intended to foster such collaborations. So are the mixers, workshops and other relevant events that are routinely offered.

In October, CTRL Collective (CTRL, an acronym for *curation, thrive, relationship and leadership*, is pronounced "control") opened in Pasadena with a focus on the tech community, although it also welcomes people in a wide variety of other fields. It's the latest coworking space vying for the attention of entrepreneurs, innovators and independent contractors in the greater Pasadena area. (Others, with varying degrees of attention to décor, include WeWork, CrossCampus, Blankspaces, SpaceCraft and Office & Company; though it's not furnished to the nines, Prism Church offers simple, free space on Tuesdays and Fridays.) The business was born from CEO David Bren's own past experiences at other creative campus environments and his desire to take the concept a step further.

A few years ago, Bren worked full-time in real-estate finance. He also had a couple of passion projects on the side, building high-end luxury homes in Bel Air and Beverly

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Hills, and creating L.A. Track Days, a series of events allowing participants to spend six to eight hours learning to drive high-horsepower cars. As he worked on his side gigs, he found himself frequenting six Los Angeles coworking spaces in the span of six months. In the process, he began contemplating another business opportunity. “All of them fell short of my expectations,” Bren, 26, says of the workspaces he visited. “I was drawn to the proposition that the execution of the concept could be so much better. I didn’t like that just about anyone who walked in with a credit card could have access to the spaces.”

CTRL Collective, in contrast, curates its membership, interviewing potential tenants to find people whose talents and skill sets mesh well with those of other members, thus fostering the potential for real collaborations and innovation among the people working there, many of whom are fledgling entrepreneurs. And once those relationships are established, CTRL Collective’s in-house venture capitalist is available to help make the dream a reality. “It’s not that we’re looking to see who is going to be the next Uber,” Bren says. “It’s rather that we’re looking for people who are excited and willing to engage with each other and the community and lift each other up. One of our business mantras is to build relationships first and business second — not just in the corporate aspect of our company but through our member base as well.”

The first CTRL Collective opened in Playa Vista in 2015. Something else that sets them apart from the competition — there’s another location in downtown L.A. and one opening soon in Denver’s RiNo Arts District — is each venue’s distinct personality, attuned to its surrounding community. In the downtown L.A. location, for example, there’s a distinct Fashion District vibe. Playa Vista caters to tech and film-industry types. The Pasadena site, which can accommodate up to 550 members, is meant to appeal to the city’s science, technology, entrepreneur and design populations. Bren stresses, however, that “you can find any type of industry in each of our spaces.” (Bren also has plans to open additional locations in Manhattan Beach and Culver City.)

Located at 45 S. Arroyo Parkway, on the edge of Old Pasadena, CTRL Collective has found its Arroyoland home in a vintage brick building, dormant since Bally Total Fitness moved out five years ago. It boasts 4,500 square feet of midcentury modern-meets-geometric motif, as envisioned by Bren and CTRL Collective COO Taleia Mueller. “We thought, ‘How can we make this a really comfortable extension of home?’” Mueller says, describing the aesthetic as “Old Town charm with a level of sophistication that will appeal to scientific minds.”

“We’ve designed different types of work environments throughout the building to accommodate the way millennials work,” Bren adds. “They’ll typically spend two hours working on their laptop on the couch, then two hours at a standing desk, then two hours at a quiet heads-down space, then another two hours at another desk in a noisier area. Our design allows for that flow throughout a given workday.”

At press time, CTRL Collective counted folks working in biotech, design, tech media and fashion design among its growing roster of Pasadena members. Available amenities include private phone booths, 3D printers, laser cutters, a creation lab that houses photo and lighting equipment and a computer lab with installed Adobe Suite and CAD software, eliminating the need for a fledgling startup to make costly purchases early in the game.

There are also workshops and classes; community events, both private and public, such as Innovate Pasadena’s recent 10-day Connect ’17 festival, which took place throughout the city in more than 80 venues, including CTRL Collective; yoga classes; a coffee bar

David Bren



Taleia Mueller



and snacks; valet parking; videoconference rooms; and free printing. It’s even dog-friendly.

Another important element of the CTRL Collective ethos is a strong commitment to giving back. The company’s 80/20 rule urges members to spend 80 percent of their time working and the other 20 percent helping others. “That could quite literally be as simple as helping someone [else at the Collective] work on their project,” Mueller says. She’s proud of Operation Give Back, a recent member drive at the Playa Vista property. Funds were raised to give backpacks, filled with enough supplies for the entire school year, to local children in need, and she looks forward to similar endeavors in Pasadena. “Our members were so happy and thankful that they could be a part of impacting the lives of this younger generation.

“We want people to know that we are leading by example,” she continues. “We want our members to set a really strong example in our community. In exchange, we will help you with anything and everything possible to help make your dream a reality.”

CTRL Collective memberships begin at \$79 per month for nights and weekends; \$199 part-time (10 days per month); \$349 full-time; \$599 for a dedicated desk; \$1,350 for private offices. Custom corporate plans are also available. Visit [ctrlcollective.com](http://ctrlcollective.com).