

## A Former Auto Garage Has Been Transformed into a Luxe New Dispensary

Commune designs a new boutique cannabis experience in Los Angeles for Portland, Oregon-based brand Serra.

by [Jessica Ritz](#)

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Commune Design has transformed a former auto garage into a luxe dispensary for Oregon-based brand, Serra.

Courtesy Laure Joliet

With most commercial, hospitality, and retail businesses in California heavily impacted by shelter-in-place orders, many designers have resigned themselves to the reality of their public-facing projects shuttering for the foreseeable future. When construction of the [Serra](#) cannabis boutique in Los Angeles was newly complete, however, the team at [Commune](#) has been able to see this endeavor launch and continually operate.

Cannabis retail is considered an essential business in California, so the Portland, Oregon-based brand has established its presence on West Third Street, albeit now with COVID-mandated restrictions in place. The L.A. firm behind projects such as multiple Ace Hotel outposts, the Tartine Manufactory in San Francisco, Heath Ceramics stores, and multi- and single-family residential work transformed what had been a former auto garage into an opportunity to showcase its interdisciplinary talents in a fresh context.



With 'Serra' meaning greenhouse in Italian, the space's ample natural light was both an aesthetic and functional fit for the dispensary.

Courtesy Laure Joliet



Despite the building's rough condition from its intensely used former life (auto repair isn't exactly gentle on a property) that required almost three years of construction, the existing space itself was organically conducive to its adaptive reuse. "Serra' means greenhouse in Italian and this idea of a greenhouse is at the core of the brand," explains firm co-founder and principal Roman Alonso. The expansive interior and ample natural light were an aesthetic and functional fit for Serra, and while it wasn't exactly part of the plan, Commune's scheme with separate areas and ample room for circulation supports comfortable, socially distanced shopping.

"The client wanted to communicate a new type of luxury in the cannabis space and we set out to do that by refining details and bumping things up a notch all around," Alonso observes. He drew from his own experiences working at Barneys New York during the late 1980s and early 1990s when the luxury retail experience was robust, distinctive, and highly creative. (Commune co-founder and principal Steven Johanknecht also established his career in fashion retail before transitioning to interior and product design.)



Materials like Carrara marble, reeded white oak millwork, and brass fill the space.

Courtesy Laure Joliet

Serra is arranged around “mini-departments” where customers can find edibles, topicals, and vaping accessories, for instance, as well as what Alonso describes as an “elegant ‘flower’ counter at the center which showcases their extensive cannabis strains as if they were jewelry.” The relatively discrete sections also help the process of educating clientele, from cannabis novices to experienced consumers. Materials like Carrara marble, reeded white oak millwork, and brass are a departure from stereotypical cultural associations.

“This was an entirely new category, and there was a lot we had to learn about the product and the client’s merchandising needs,” Alonso reflects. The nature of the inventory itself posed another learning curve for the designers because of the constantly evolving code compliance requirements and a complex regulatory environment.

Alonso and his cohort at Commune relished the challenge. “When you have a good understanding of the basics, you are able to adapt and address anything new successfully,” he says.













