

THE CALIFORNIA REPORT

London 'Steals' San Francisco Cultural Anti-Displacement Idea



LISTEN 2 min



Performing Arts presenter CounterPulse's space at 80 Turk St. in San Francisco's Tenderloin. The arts nonprofit was able to secure a permanent home for itself with help from the Community Arts Stabilization Trust (CAST). Building by Jensen Architects. **(Courtesy of Cesar Rubio/CounterPulse)**

If you've watched with dismay as San Francisco's sky-high rents push out yet another favorite music venue, gallery or indie movie theater, take heart: There's a homegrown solution at hand. And other cities around the world, like London, are starting to look to San Francisco for inspiration when it comes to helping artists and creative organizations stay put.

Most people think of London as a huge city with a monumental cultural legacy, stretching from Shakespeare to Adele.

But it's also a city facing a cultural crisis, says [Justine Simons](#), London's deputy mayor for culture and the creative industries. And that is one of the things London and San Francisco have in common.

"Unaffordability is a big issue for London and San Francisco," Simons said. "And we both have issues around the protection and the retention of creative workspace and artists studios. The whole creative infrastructure is under a lot of pressure."



Justine Simons, London's deputy mayor of culture and the creative industries. (Courtesy of Mayor of London website)

Simons was in San Francisco recently presiding over the [World Cities Culture Summit](#) — an annual gathering of 40 or so cultural leaders from across the globe.

"We get together and share our ideas," Simons said. "And we also steal the best ideas from each other."

Like an idea London recently stole from San Francisco to reduce cultural displacement — [Community Arts Stabilization Trust](#) — or CAST for short.

"London has been completely inspired by the San Francisco CAST model, to the extent that we are setting up our own version of it," Simons said.

CAST is a nonprofit real estate development and holding company that helps arts groups secure space through long-term below-market leases and a lease-to-own model funded by philanthropy and other sources. It has raised \$36 million to support a handful of projects since 2013.

The company has also helped nonprofit cultural groups keep the lights on in the shorter term, through providing \$1.8 million in grants and technical assistance to date.

CAST projects at various stages of development include helping performing arts presenter [CounterPulse](#) and the [Luggage Store Gallery](#) secure permanent spaces in the Tenderloin and mid-Market areas respectively, as well as working on plans to restore the Geneva Car Barn in the Excelsior neighborhood and create an arts and culture center as part of the 5M development in downtown San Francisco.



Moy Eng, CAST executive director (Chloe Veltman/KQED)

"The elements that are really critical to having creatives in our city are leadership, financial resources and space," said CAST's executive director, Moy Eng. "As the space has gotten increasingly expensive, we purchase property through subsidy and low-interest financing to make it possible for arts groups to stay here in our city."

Eng said CounterPulse received \$6 million in financing from CAST and has seven years to raise the money needed to purchase its premises at 80 Turk St. from her company at a cost frozen in 2015. "That's well below market," Eng said.

The Luggage Store Gallery has a similar lease-to-own arrangement with CAST.

CounterPulse artistic and executive director Julie Phelps said her organization has raised \$4 million of the \$7 million

it needs to buy CAST out in 2023. She said helping to stabilize a couple of cultural groups might be a drop in the bucket when so many are desperate for affordable space.

Yet, she said, the model is powerful, because it not only secures a future for her own organization, but also helps stabilize the futures of other individual artists and groups working in CounterPulse's orbit.



Justin Simons, left, London deputy mayor for culture and the creative industries, and CounterPulse executive and artistic director Julie Phelps, at CounterPulse on Nov. 13, 2018. (Kate Patterson)

"Having a permanent facility doesn't just benefit CounterPulse because we serve countless artists and small companies every year," Phelps said. "So those artists are also all stabilized by way of CounterPulse being stabilized."

London's version of CAST is expected to launch next year. But the UK capital isn't the only city to come calling: Auckland, Tel Aviv and Amsterdam, among other urban centers, are also seeking anti-cultural displacement advice from San Francisco, as are several other cities around the United States, like Seattle, Austin and Denver.

"That the model is being applied to cities around the world is really where the broad impact is coming," Phelps said.

Eng said she's thrilled so many urban centers are hoping to replicate San Francisco's CAST model. But she said each has to come up with its own take on the idea.

"We don't think we're the silver bullet," Eng said. "What we can present is an illustration of what could work in a major city, and it will take its own form and set of nuances in each particular city."