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The Architecture of Expansion

How portfolio operators lose time, money, and design integrity in physical retail development. And the process redesign that recovers all three.

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Executive Summary

Physical retail is expanding. After a decade of contraction narratives, the data tells a different story. CBRE reports that retail leasing activity in the United States reached its highest level since 2017, with net absorption turning positive across all major metro categories.[1] Luxury and premium brands are leading: Kering opened 96 net new stores globally in 2024; LVMH's Selective Retailing division posted 9% organic revenue growth; Tapestry's store fleet grew for the first time in three years.[2]

The problem is not whether to expand. It is how. The standard store development process, from letter of intent to building permit, runs approximately 33 weeks for a specialty retailer. The full cycle from LOI to store opening stretches to 63 weeks. During that period, rent obligations often commence 20 weeks after lease execution, creating roughly eight months of occupancy cost with zero revenue. For a 12,000 square foot store at $55 per square foot, that exposure exceeds $350,000 per location before a single customer walks in.

This paper examines why the standard process produces these outcomes, identifies the structural causes, and presents a redesigned development model that compresses the LOI-to-permit timeline from 33 to 26 weeks and reduces unproductive rent exposure from 32 weeks to 12. Across a portfolio operator running 10 to 15 new stores per year, the aggregate savings exceed $3 million annually in rent alone, before accounting for construction efficiencies and change order reduction.

The redesign is not theoretical. It was developed and validated through primary research at Oxford Said Business School, drawing on detailed process mapping of an active national specialty retailer's development pipeline. The framework presented here adapts that research for multi-brand portfolio operators: groups like Tapestry, Richemont, Kering, and LVMH, where the store development challenge multiplies across brands, geographies, and regulatory jurisdictions.

1. The Cost of Sequential Thinking

The conventional store development process is strictly sequential. Each phase waits for the previous phase to complete. The letter of intent is signed. Then lease negotiation begins. Then design starts. Then construction documents are produced. Then permits are filed. Then a general contractor is selected. Then construction begins. Each handoff introduces delay. Each delay is tolerated because "that is how it has always been done."

The economics of this sequence are punishing. In most commercial leases, rent commencement is tied to a fixed date after lease execution, not to store opening. The landlord's incentive is to start the revenue clock. The tenant's ability to control the interval between rent commencement and door opening depends entirely on how fast it can move through design, permitting, and construction. A sequential process guarantees that interval will be long.

Consider a representative scenario. A specialty retailer targets a 12,000 square foot space in a Class A shopping center. The lease specifies rent commencement 20 weeks after execution, with a base rent of $55 per square foot. The retailer's internal development process, from LOI to permit, takes 33 weeks. Construction adds another 30 weeks. Total cycle: 63 weeks from LOI to opening.

During those 63 weeks, rent is accruing for 32 of them before the store opens. At $55 per square foot on 12,000 square feet, that is $660,000 in annual rent, or approximately $12,692 per week. Thirty-two weeks of unproductive rent: $406,000. Per store. For an operator opening 12 stores a year, the portfolio-level cost of sequential development is $4.87 million annually in rent paid before any revenue is earned.

The sequential model persists for three reasons. First, it is the inherited default. Most retailers adopted their development processes in the 1990s or 2000s and have not revisited them. Second, it distributes accountability in a way that feels safe: each phase has a clear owner, and no one is responsible for the total cycle time. Third, it is reinforced by the participants. External architects, local engineers, and competitively bid general contractors all benefit from a process that treats each project as a standalone engagement. The system serves the participants. It does not serve the operator.

2. The Participants Problem

The store development process involves five principal participants: the retailer's real estate team, an external design firm, a local architect of record (AOR), a general contractor (GC), and the landlord. The way these participants are selected, contracted, and coordinated is the single largest source of inefficiency in the process.

The Design Firm

Most specialty retailers outsource store design to a third-party firm. The design firm operates in what we term a "creative bubble": it receives a program brief, produces design concepts, and delivers drawings. It does not participate in lease negotiation, site survey, or construction. It rarely sees the budget. It almost never visits the site before design begins.

The creative bubble produces beautiful renderings disconnected from the constraints of the actual space. The design assumes a clean shell. The site has structural columns in unexpected locations. The design specifies custom millwork. The budget was set for standard finishes. The design calls for a ceiling height that the landlord's HVAC infrastructure will not permit. Each of these gaps becomes a change order, a delay, or both. The design firm is not at fault. It is working with the information it was given. The process fails to give it the right information at the right time.

The Architect of Record

The AOR is the licensed architect who stamps the construction documents and manages the permitting process in the local jurisdiction. In the standard model, the AOR is selected project by project, typically based on proximity to the site and familiarity with the local building department. This means a different AOR for each new market.

The cost of this approach is institutional knowledge. Every new AOR must learn the retailer's standards, specifications, and preferred details from scratch. Every set of construction documents is produced without reference to the last set. Errors that were caught and corrected on the previous project reappear on the next one because a different firm is doing the work. The retailer pays for the same learning curve repeatedly: typically 15 to 20 hours of onboarding time per project, multiplied across 10 to 15 projects per year.

The General Contractor

General contractors are competitively bid per project. The rationale is cost control: by soliciting three to five bids per store, the retailer ensures competitive pricing. The reality is different.

Competitive bidding optimizes for first cost. It does not optimize for total cost. A GC bidding on a single project has no incentive to invest in understanding the retailer's standards, no motivation to suggest value-engineering improvements that would benefit future projects, and no reason to absorb minor cost overruns to preserve a relationship. Every project is a transaction. Transaction-based relationships produce transaction-based outcomes: aggressive bids followed by aggressive change orders. Industry data suggests that change orders on competitively bid retail construction projects average 8% to 12% of the original contract value.[3] On a $1.2 million buildout, that is $96,000 to $144,000 in unplanned cost.

The participants problem compounds across a portfolio operator's brands. A group like Tapestry (Coach, Kate Spade, Stuart Weitzman) or Kering (Gucci, Saint Laurent, Bottega Veneta, Balenciaga) may be running 30 to 50 new store projects annually across brands. If each brand selects its own design firm, its own local AORs, and its own competitively bid GCs, the portfolio is paying the learning curve tax dozens of times per year. The knowledge gained on a Coach buildout in Dallas never reaches the Kate Spade project in the same market.

3. Current vs. Redesigned Development Timeline

The following table maps the standard sequential process against the redesigned parallel model. Weeks are measured from LOI signature. The redesigned model introduces three structural changes: site survey and due diligence begin at LOI (parallel to lease negotiation), design runs concurrent with late-stage lease negotiation, and construction documents are produced using a service factory model with pre-established AOR relationships.

Phase	Current Model (Weeks from LOI)	Redesigned Model (Weeks from LOI)	Savings
LOI Execution	Week 0	Week 0	
Site Survey / Due Diligence	Weeks 18-22 (after lease)	Weeks 1-4 (parallel to lease)	**14-18 weeks**
Lease Negotiation	Weeks 1-18	Weeks 1-16	2 weeks
Lease Execution	Week 18	Week 16	2 weeks
Rent Commencement	Week 38 (lease + 20 wks)	Week 36 (lease + 20 wks)	2 weeks
Design (Concept to DD)	Weeks 22-33 (11 weeks, sequential)	Weeks 4-16 (12 weeks, parallel to lease)	**6-17 weeks (on critical path)**
Construction Documents	Weeks 33-41 (8 weeks)	Weeks 16-22 (6 weeks, service factory)	**11 weeks (on critical path)**
Permitting	Weeks 41-47 (6 weeks)	Weeks 22-26 (4 weeks, pre-positioned)	15 weeks (on critical path)
GC Mobilization	Weeks 41-47 (bid + award)	Week 24 (pre-contracted)	17 weeks
Construction	Weeks 47-63 (16 weeks)	Weeks 26-40 (14 weeks)	7 weeks
Store Opening	Week 63	Week 40	**23 weeks total**

Figure 1. Current vs. redesigned store development timeline. Total cycle compression: 63 weeks to approximately 40 weeks. Unproductive rent exposure: 32 weeks (current) vs. 4 weeks (redesigned).

The critical insight is not that individual phases are shorter. Some are roughly the same duration. The compression comes from running phases in parallel rather than in sequence, and from eliminating the onboarding overhead that accompanies project-by-project vendor selection. When a regional AOR has produced 15 sets of construction documents for the same retailer, the 16th takes six weeks instead of eight. When a regional GC has built 20 stores for the same brand, mobilization is a phone call instead of a six-week bid process.

4. Redesigning the Ecosystem

The redesigned model restructures the participant ecosystem around three principles: internalize creative control, regionalize technical execution, and build relationships that compound.

In-House Design Studio

The single highest-leverage change is bringing store design in-house. An internal design studio eliminates the creative bubble. Designers sit alongside the real estate team. They see the site survey data as it arrives. They know the lease constraints before they start drawing. They attend the kickoff meeting with the landlord and walk the space before putting pen to paper.

The financial case is straightforward. A third-party design firm charges $150,000 to $250,000 per store for a full-service design engagement (concept through design development). An in-house studio of four to six designers, fully loaded at $800,000 to $1.2 million annually, can produce 12 to 18 store designs per year. The per-store cost drops to $65,000 to $100,000. For a 12-store annual program, the savings are $600,000 to $1.8 million per year in direct design fees alone.

But the real value is not cost reduction. It is speed and quality. An in-house team that designs the same brand's stores repeatedly develops a library of proven solutions. Column in the wrong place? They have solved that three times before. Unusual ceiling condition? They have a detail for it. The institutional knowledge that evaporates with external firms accumulates internally. Each project gets faster and better.

Two Regional Architects of Record

Instead of selecting a local AOR per project, the redesigned model contracts two regional firms: one covering the eastern United States, one covering the west. (International operators may add regional AORs for Europe, Asia-Pacific, and the Middle East.) Each firm handles all projects in its territory for a minimum two-year term.

The benefits are immediate and cumulative. In year one, each firm learns the retailer's standards, typical details, and preferred specifications. By year two, construction documents are produced from templates rather than from scratch. By year three, the AOR can often anticipate permitting issues in jurisdictions it has worked before and pre-address them in the initial submission, reducing permit review cycles from six weeks to three or four.

For a portfolio operator, the regional AOR model scales across brands. A single eastern AOR can serve Coach, Kate Spade, and Stuart Weitzman in their territory. The firm develops expertise not just in one brand's standards but in the portfolio's shared infrastructure: common HVAC approaches, similar electrical requirements, consistent accessibility details. Knowledge compounds across brands.

Four Regional General Contractors

The redesigned model replaces competitive bidding with regional GC partnerships. Four firms, each covering a defined territory (Northeast, Southeast, Central, West), receive all projects in their region on negotiated terms. The terms are renegotiated annually based on performance, cost, and volume.

This structure inverts the incentive model. A GC with a guaranteed pipeline has reason to invest in the relationship. It trains its crews on the retailer's standards. It stocks commonly used materials. It assigns a dedicated project manager who knows the brand's expectations. The result: construction timelines compress from 16 weeks to 14, change orders drop from 8-12% to 2-4% of contract value, and the retailer gains a partner rather than a vendor.

The financial impact of change order reduction alone is significant. On a $1.2 million buildout, moving from 10% change orders (competitive bid average) to 3% (relationship model) saves $84,000 per store. Across 12 stores: just over $1 million annually.

5. The Parallel Process

The redesigned development model replaces linear sequencing with structured parallelism. Three workstreams run simultaneously from the moment an LOI is signed: lease negotiation, site investigation, and design.

Site Survey at LOI

In the current model, site survey and due diligence begin after lease execution. The rationale: why spend money investigating a space you have not yet committed to? The redesigned model inverts this logic. Site survey begins within one week of LOI, while lease negotiation is underway.

The cost of a site survey is $8,000 to $15,000 (as-built measurements, MEP documentation, structural assessment, ADA compliance review). The cost of not having that information during design is far higher: change orders, redesign cycles, and construction surprises that collectively run $50,000 to $150,000 per project. The survey investment pays for itself five to ten times over.

There is an objection: what if the lease falls through? The survey cost is lost. This is true. But LOI-to-lease conversion rates for established retailers in negotiated deals run 85% to 90%.[4] The expected cost of abandoned surveys ($1,200 to $2,250 per project when amortized across the portfolio) is trivial compared to the time savings on projects that proceed.

Design Parallel to Lease Negotiation

With site survey data in hand by week 4, the in-house design studio begins concept development while the lease is still being negotiated. This is the single largest source of timeline compression: it moves 12 weeks of design work off the critical path entirely.

The risk is designing for a space the operator may not secure. But the design work at this stage is conceptual, not detailed. It establishes the spatial strategy: where the entrance falls, how the selling floor is organized, where the stockroom sits, how the customer circulates. This work must happen regardless of final lease terms. Starting it at week 4 instead of week 22 compresses the overall timeline by months.

Structured Milestone Meetings

The redesigned process introduces five formal milestone meetings, each with defined deliverables and decision gates. These meetings replace the informal check-ins that characterize most development processes and create accountability for both progress and decisions.

Milestone	Timing	Deliverables	Decision Gate
Kickoff	Week 1-2 (post-LOI)	Site survey scope, design brief, preliminary budget, schedule	Confirm project proceed/hold
First Look	Week 6-7	2-3 concept options, site survey results, preliminary cost estimate	Select concept direction
Schematic Design	Week 10-11	Floor plan, elevations, material palette, updated cost estimate	Approve schematic design
Design Development	Week 14-15	Detailed drawings, specifications, final material selections, firm budget	Lock design; authorize CD production
Design Transfer	Week 16	Complete DD package transferred to AOR for CD production	Confirm CD scope and schedule

Figure 2. Structured milestone meetings with defined deliverables and decision gates.

The milestone structure serves two purposes. First, it forces decisions at defined intervals. In the current model, design decisions drift: a material selection deferred at week 6 becomes a change order at week 40. The milestone gates prevent drift by requiring explicit approval before the next phase begins. Second, it creates a shared calendar that aligns all participants. The AOR knows when to expect the design transfer. The GC knows when construction documents will arrive. The landlord knows when to expect permit submission. Predictability replaces improvisation.

6. The Service Factory

The construction document phase is where the redesigned model delivers its most counterintuitive benefit. In conventional practice, construction documents are treated as a creative exercise: a continuation of the design process. The redesigned model treats them as a production process. Once design decisions are locked at the Design Development milestone, the CD phase becomes a service factory.

A service factory is a process that produces a standardized output from a defined input, with predictable quality, cost, and cycle time. The concept is borrowed from operations management, where it describes services that are high-volume, low-variability, and process-driven (think tax preparation or insurance underwriting). Applied to construction documents, it means the AOR receives a complete DD package with all creative decisions resolved and produces a permit-ready CD set through a templated, repeatable process.

This works because most retail construction documents are 70% to 80% identical from project to project. The structural details, MEP specifications, accessibility requirements, and code compliance sections are substantially the same for every 8,000 to 15,000 square foot store in the same brand. What changes is the specific floor plan, the site-specific conditions, and the jurisdictional requirements. A regional AOR that has produced 15 CD sets for the same brand can template the repeating elements and focus its professional attention on the project-specific variations.

The result: CD production drops from eight weeks to six. More importantly, the output quality becomes consistent and predictable. The permit reviewer sees the same format, the same level of detail, and the same organizational structure every time. Permit review cycles shorten because the reviewer is not learning a new document style with each submission.

For portfolio operators, the service factory model scales across brands. A regional AOR producing construction documents for three brands in the same portfolio develops templates for each brand. The shared elements (structural, MEP, code compliance) are common across brands. The brand-specific elements (finishes, fixtures, signage) are templated per brand. The AOR becomes more efficient with every project, and that efficiency accrues to the operator as lower fees and faster delivery.

7. Financial Impact

The redesigned development model generates savings across four categories. The following analysis assumes a portfolio operator running 12 new stores per year, with an average store size of 12,000 square feet and an average base rent of $55 per square foot.

Rent Exposure Reduction

The current model produces 32 weeks of unproductive rent (rent accruing before the store opens and generates revenue). The redesigned model compresses this to approximately 4 weeks. The per-store savings: 28 weeks at $12,692/week = $355,000. Across 12 stores: **$4.26 million annually**.

This is not a cost reduction. It is a timing shift. The operator pays the same total rent over the lease term. But it begins paying rent only when (or near when) it begins earning revenue. The cash flow impact is material: $4.26 million in working capital that was previously tied up in unproductive occupancy cost is now available for inventory, marketing, or additional store openings.

Change Order Reduction

The combination of in-house design (eliminating the creative bubble), early site survey (eliminating construction surprises), and regional GC relationships (eliminating adversarial dynamics) reduces change orders from the industry average of 8-12% to an achievable 2-4%. On a $1.2 million average buildout, this represents $72,000 to $96,000 in savings per store. Across 12 stores: **$864,000 to $1.15 million annually**.

Construction Timeline Compression

Regional GC partnerships compress construction timelines by approximately two weeks per project through crew familiarity, pre-stocked materials, and reduced mobilization time. Each week of construction saved is a week of earlier revenue. For a store generating $400 per square foot annually (a reasonable assumption for a specialty retailer), two weeks of earlier opening represents approximately $184,600 in incremental revenue per store. Across 12 stores: **$2.22 million in accelerated revenue**.

Design Fee Reduction

Internalizing design reduces per-store design costs by $65,000 to $150,000, depending on the current third-party fee structure. Across 12 stores: **$780,000 to $1.8 million annually**.

Category	Per Store	12-Store Program	Type
Rent exposure reduction	$355,000	$4,260,000	Cash flow
Change order reduction	$72,000-$96,000	$864,000-$1,152,000	Hard cost savings
Construction acceleration	$184,600	$2,215,000	Incremental revenue
Design fee reduction	$65,000-$150,000	$780,000-$1,800,000	Hard cost savings
Total annual impact		**$8.1M-$9.4M**	

Figure 3. Annual financial impact of redesigned development model for a 12-store program.

These figures are conservative. They do not account for soft benefits: reduced project management overhead, lower legal costs from standardized contractor agreements, or the compounding effect of institutional knowledge over multiple years. A portfolio operator in year three of the redesigned model will see meaningfully better results than in year one, as the AOR and GC relationships mature and the in-house design library deepens.

8. Implications for Multi-Brand Operators

The analysis above models a single brand. The implications for multi-brand portfolio operators are multiplicative, not merely additive. A portfolio structure creates three opportunities that a single brand cannot capture.

Shared AOR Relationships Across Brands

A regional AOR serving three brands in the same portfolio develops expertise across all three. The structural and MEP elements of construction documents are largely brand-agnostic. The code compliance requirements are identical. The jurisdictional knowledge transfers perfectly. An AOR that has permitted stores for Brand A in a given municipality can permit stores for Brand B in the same municipality with zero jurisdictional learning curve.

The volume also creates negotiating leverage. A portfolio offering 30 to 40 projects per year across brands commands different fee structures than a single brand offering 12. AOR fees in a portfolio model can be 15% to 25% lower than single-brand rates, reflecting both the volume guarantee and the reduced onboarding cost per project.

Regional GC Partnerships as Portfolio Infrastructure

The same logic applies to general contractors. A GC with a guaranteed volume of 8 to 12 projects per year across three brands in its region will invest in capabilities that a project-by-project GC will not: dedicated crews trained on the portfolio's standards, pre-purchased materials for common specifications, and project management infrastructure tuned to the portfolio's milestone schedule. These investments reduce the GC's cost to serve, savings that are shared through negotiated pricing.

More importantly, the regional GC becomes a source of market intelligence. It knows which jurisdictions are slow. It knows which subcontractors are reliable. It knows when material costs are rising and can advise on timing decisions. This intelligence, invisible in a competitive bid model, becomes a portfolio asset in a relationship model.

The Design Studio as Portfolio Asset

An in-house design studio serving a multi-brand portfolio becomes something more than a cost center. It becomes a strategic asset. The studio holds the accumulated design knowledge of every brand in the portfolio: what works in 3,000 square foot inline stores, what fails in 15,000 square foot flagships, how traffic patterns differ between luxury and contemporary brands.

This knowledge enables cross-pollination. A spatial solution developed for one brand can be adapted for another. A material innovation tested in a flagship can be scaled across the portfolio. The studio

becomes the portfolio's physical retail R&D; function, continuously improving the store experience across brands while maintaining each brand's distinct identity.

For a group operating 30 to 50 stores annually across three to five brands, the aggregate financial impact of the redesigned model is in the range of $20 million to $30 million per year: rent exposure reduction, change order savings, construction acceleration, and design fee reduction, compounded by portfolio-level efficiencies that a single brand cannot achieve.

9. Connection to Sovereign Architecture

Bureau St. James works with multi-brand operators through a framework called Sovereign Architecture. The framework operates at three levels: L1 (Strategy), L2 (Operations), and L3 (Architecture). The store development redesign described in this paper is a concrete example of what L2 and L3 look like in practice.

L2: Operations

Sovereign Architecture Level 2 examines how an organization's operational processes are designed, measured, and governed. In the context of physical retail development, L2 asks: is the store development process a designed system, or an inherited assembly of ad-hoc practices?

The current model is assembled. It was not designed as a system. It emerged from a series of individual decisions: outsource design because we do not have designers on staff; hire local AORs because we need local expertise; bid GCs competitively because procurement requires it. Each decision was locally rational. The aggregate is systemically irrational. The process takes 63 weeks because no one designed it to take less.

The redesigned model is a designed system. Every participant, every timeline, and every decision gate was chosen to optimize total cycle time and total cost, not to optimize any single phase. This is the difference between an assembled process and an architected one. L2 maturity means the organization has moved from the former to the latter across its critical operational domains.

L3: Architecture

Sovereign Architecture Level 3 examines the structural decisions that govern how the organization's parts relate to each other. In the context of store development, L3 is the decision to create regional partnerships rather than project-by-project vendor selection. It is the decision to build an in-house design studio rather than outsource to a different firm each year. It is the decision to structure the CD phase as a service factory rather than a bespoke professional service.

These are architectural decisions because they shape every project that follows. They are not project-level choices. They are system-level designs. And they compound: the value of the regional AOR relationship in year three is meaningfully greater than in year one, because the accumulated knowledge, templates, and jurisdictional familiarity make every subsequent project faster and better.

For portfolio operators, L3 architecture extends beyond store development to encompass the relationships, processes, and systems that connect brands to shared infrastructure. The regional AOR model is a pattern, not just a store development tactic. The same principle (regionalized, long-term, knowledge-compounding partnerships) applies to supply chain, technology, and real estate

management across the portfolio.

The question for any portfolio operator is not whether to redesign its store development process. The question is whether the cost of not redesigning it, measured in unproductive rent, redundant learning curves, adversarial contractor relationships, and cycle times that belong to a previous era, is one it is willing to continue paying.

10. Conclusion

Physical retail expansion is accelerating. The operators who capture the value of that expansion will not be those who open the most stores. They will be those who open stores fastest, at the lowest unproductive cost, and with the highest design integrity.

The store development process is not a back-office function. It is a competitive weapon. An operator that can move from LOI to opening in 40 weeks instead of 63 can act on real estate opportunities that slower competitors cannot. An operator that begins generating revenue 28 weeks earlier per store can reinvest that capital into additional locations. An operator whose design studio produces stores that are both brand-right and budget-right, on the first attempt, spends its energy on customer experience rather than change order negotiation.

The redesign described in this paper is not complex. It requires three structural decisions: internalize design, regionalize technical partners, and run processes in parallel. The economics are favorable from year one and improve with each subsequent year as institutional knowledge compounds. The total annual impact for a 12-store single-brand program exceeds $8 million. For a multi-brand portfolio operator, the figure is $20 million to $30 million.

The obstacle is not technical. It is organizational. The current process persists because it distributes risk in a way that protects individuals (no single person is accountable for total cycle time) at the expense of the organization (which pays $350,000 per store in unproductive rent). Changing the process requires someone to take accountability for the system, not just its parts.

That is an architectural decision. And it is the one that separates portfolio operators who expand efficiently from those who simply expand.

Notes

[1] CBRE, "U.S. Retail MarketFlash," Q4 2025. Net absorption for U.S. retail turned positive in 2024 for the first time since 2019, with vacancy rates at 4.1%, the lowest level recorded since CBRE began tracking the metric.

[2] Kering Annual Report, 2024; LVMH Annual Report, 2024; Tapestry Q4 2025 Earnings Call. Store count figures reflect net openings (new stores minus closures).

[3] FMI/CMAA, "Tenth Annual Survey of Owners," 2024. Change order rates for retail construction averaged 9.7% of original contract value across competitively bid projects. Negotiated or relationship-based contracts averaged 3.2%.

[4] ICSC Research, "Retail Lease Execution Rates," 2024. LOI-to-lease conversion rates for established retailers with investment-grade credit range from 84% to 92%, depending on market conditions and asset class.

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Bureau St. James is a consultancy practice led by James Smith. The Bureau works with multi-brand operators, family offices, and portfolio entities on the architectural problems that sit between strategy and technology. bureaustjames.com