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Dyer Brown transforms headquarters

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Boston, MA While celebrating over 50 years of architecture and interior design innovation, nationally renowned architecture and interiors firm Dyer Brown turned their workplace strategy expertise inward to redesign their own office. The firm completed the renovation and expansion, which has transformed their headquarters into the kind of world-class, high-performing workplace they are renowned for designing for the companies, including several Fortune 500 companies, in the firm's North American portfolio.

Taking themselves through the same engagement and visioning workshops they apply to their efforts for clients, Dyer Brown investigated their own company culture revealing preferences among the staff for a space that supports employee wellbeing, productivity, and satisfaction. The innovative workplace design that emerged from this comprehensive process is tailored specifically to the firm, emphasizing Dyer Brown's unique culture and drawing inspiration from the firm's hospitality portfolio to create a cozy yet professional setting. The renovated offices also feature a number of elements that represent the firm's recent innovations in interior design, presenting to visitors and clients a living, three-dimensional portfolio.

"At Dyer Brown, we believe culture must drive design," said Brent Zeigler, AIA, IIDA, Dyer Brown's president and director of design. "Our most successful projects start with full engagement with the client company's staff and leadership, uncovering essential insights into their company culture and workflow. We recognized that we had to take the same approach for our own office redesign to be a success."

The project's lead designers conducted a series of comprehensive, LEAN-inspired design exercises and various surveys that Dyer Brown's entire staff took part of, a process that ensured everyone's voice was heard. The team anticipated some of what the process would uncover, but many key insights were unexpected – for example, the preference for comfortable and even "cozy" spaces that the staff believed would foster creativity and spontaneous conversations. The top-level goals of the project for the staff as revealed by the workshops indicated a desire for an office that would:

- support employee health and wellbeing
- enhance productivity
- offer on-the-job satisfaction (i.e. a comfortable work environment), and

- be a workplace to feel proud of.

“The updated headquarters could not be anything like a typical corporate interior,” said project manager Alex Dupnik. “We needed to provide a space for our coworkers that would feel comfortable yet productive, and inspiring. For visiting clients, we wanted to offer moments of surprise elements that defy expectation, to encourage them to think outside the box.”

The result is a space that offers Dyer Brown staff a variety of furniture options to suit individual work styles and encourage various seating postures. Employees avail themselves of mezzanine workstations with sit-to-stand desks – illuminated by overhead fixtures constructed from noise-attenuating materials – as well as lounge spaces with charging ports for devices, hoteling areas, uniquely appointed small ‘speakeasy’ meeting rooms (available to book using a web-based scheduling app), and wall-inset individual upholstered cubbies.

When not engaged in heads-down work, Dyer Brown’s staff now also have choices for meetings, eating, relaxing and personal care. The reception area is designed as a front-and-center ‘café’ with counter seating, chic pendant lighting and still and sparkling water on tap – a space with a distinctly informal feel, like a coffee bar. The new programming also offers eight reservable meeting spaces of varying sizes, doubling the number of rooms previously available to book for formal and informal meetings with clients and/or coworkers, and the hospitality-inspired design scheme offers a variety of seating and furniture types to ensure comfort and enhance productivity.

And, in support of employee wellbeing and productivity, the redesign includes amenities such as lockers, a shower room, a mother’s room, and a ‘wellness room’ for quiet reflection, meditation, and catnaps. “The engagement workshops made clear that wellbeing is central to our firm culture, so health and wellness became major drivers of the design,” said Zeigler. “Most notably, all of the workstations feature new sit-to-stand desks. These were mentioned multiple times in the workshops, and after investigating the costs and potential benefits, we decided to invest in these desks rather than in new chairs. So far, the reaction has been strongly positive.”

The revamped headquarters also serves as a kind of living portfolio, making it a uniquely robust tool for engagement, education and business development. According to Dupnik, “A question from a visiting client about something as simple as a paint color can lead to a discussion integration of corporate brand identity. Or a visit to the bathroom might cause a visitor to ask about our touchless faucets, turning the conversation toward the benefits of a workplace wellness strategy.” Another technological innovation expected to draw the interest of visitors, said Dupnik, is the color-temperature-tunable lighting in the ‘design library’ that allow designers and clients to observe finish materials in the anticipated environment of a completed project. “We’re noticing more and more staff host client meetings in the library, as opposed to a meeting room, because of this feature.”

“But the most important aspect of the design, for us and for our visitors, is how well the design reflects and supports our culture,” said Zeigler. “That is what we want potential clients to take away from their visit: that their own workplace project can and should reflect their corporate culture as

much as our headquarters does for us.”

Following the renovation, Dyer Brown’s leadership expect to have a lasting impact those who come into contact with the firm, driving new areas of thinking and discussion in the world of workplace strategy and design.

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