

architecture & design

O F T H E W E S T

Beautiful spaces and the people who design, live and work in them



achievement

A fabulous view of the Queen City and the Rocky Mountains beyond acts as a locator for an elegantly urban, Gensler-designed office on the 41st and 42nd floors of a downtown Denver high rise. By Kimberly MacArthur Graham
Photography by Ron Pollard Photography



An intelligent and timeless design scheme, featuring contrasting light and dark wood tones, marble and granite accents and sleek-lined furniture conveys international law firm Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher's quality, competence and reliability, while giving a nod to stylishness.

The reception desk beckons visitors the moment they exit the elevator, its central location offering the receptionist an unobstructed view of new arrivals. After taking in panoramic views of mountains and city, visitors can focus on the gorgeous staircase that emerges just off to the side of the lobby. A dramatic two-story stairwell wall in Crema Dorado marble offers a key visual connection between the two floors. The stair railing, stately and transparent, is constructed of glass panels and polished stainless steel. And the bottom of the staircase reveals a nice surprise—a plush and intimate seating area.

It is amazing, then, to realize that this beautifully appointed office is not an entirely new construct, but a renovation of the office the firm has occupied for years. Though this Gensler redesign was the first time the Denver offices of both companies worked together, Gensler, with offices in 25 cities and a 40-year history of providing clients across the globe with award-winning design, had designed office space for Gibson Dunn in several other locations. Since the law firm had enjoyed consistently great results with Gensler, it made sense to partner with them for this effort, too.

Decision time

Going the remodel route wasn't a foregone conclusion. The client had a long list of requirements which, before any design work began, Gensler helped match with other available office downtown space. (The firm was insistent on remaining in the heart of downtown.) After intensive office tours and extensive analysis, designer

and client agreed that the most effective plan would involve renovating the client's existing office on floors 41 and 42 of 1801 California, a high-rise built in 1983.

Once it was determined that a remodel was the way to go, a series of visioning sessions were conducted to get the opinions of different stakeholders: management, attorneys and administrative staff. During closed-door sessions (because they offer the greatest candor), Gensler took note of the range of needs and ideas that were voiced, and ultimately came up with a program to satisfy as many people as possible.

A design committee comprised of Gibson Dunn personnel was formed to make the final decisions on the project. Headed by partner Glenn Beaton, the committee was representative of the entire firm. Committee member and firm administrator Diana Carstenson was the daily contact point for the project. Denver's Weitz Construction/Rocky Mountain was chosen for the construction.

Gensler project designer Carol Koplin, ASID, comments that, even once the design committee identified "classic design, timeless in its style" as the preferred look, moving forward was not necessarily quick or easy. "We had to decide what people meant by classic, traditional, contemporary," says Koplin. "We pasted up photos and said, Show us what you like."

The client also had determined that,



from a budgetary perspective, public spaces took priority, and so private office and work areas would receive only new paint and carpet. With that in mind, Gensler created an interior design program to dovetail with the existing oak-trimmed office spaces.

"They wanted to be more contemporary, so we brought in new elements to work with the existing traditional ones," explains Koplín. Colorado's sunny climate informed the choice of a light color palette of soft, natural greens, browns and creams. The furniture, too, echoes this nature-driven aesthetic, with flowing lines and mohair fabric. To accentuate the lighter colors primarily used throughout, chocolate Makore wood glistens on the reception desk and black-and-green Verde Uba Tuba granite was installed in select areas of the floors, its dark and gleaming surface a perfect foil for the buttercream walls.

Sunny and green design

Daylight streams into the lobby and conference areas, enhancing the outdoorsy feeling generated by the

impressive bird's-eye views. The plentiful daylight is complemented by efficient task lighting and ambient light that creates a warm and wakeful atmosphere in an office where work often continues long after the sun goes down (and begins long before it comes up).

Significant daylighting is only one aspect of the "green" design espoused in the office. Going green whenever possible was a shared commitment of Gensler and Gibson Dunn, and many products and finishes, including the striated eucalyptus wood used in the elevator lobby, were chosen not only for their beauty but for their environmental responsibility.

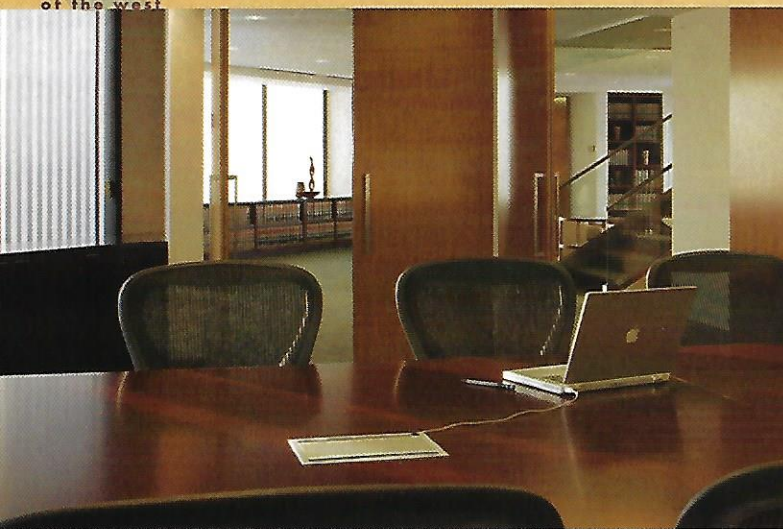
Practicality and flexibility were defining concepts for the layout of the renovated spaces. In the conference area, several rooms of different sizes are available, each set off from the main lobby by frosted glass doors with polished stainless pulls. One room seats 16 people, another only four, while a third offers a round table to give equal stature to everyone seated.

One interesting conference room,

sporting wide windows all across its outer face, seems to perch on a ledge. Gibson Dunn's Carstenson says it was critical to the firm that all these rooms be reconfigurable, as they are called on to serve many functions and host many differently sized meetings—sometimes with little time inbetween. Two good-sized rooms even share a mobile wall that can be opened to create a single room that accommodates 40 people for special events.

A catering kitchen is located near the reception areas, making preparing and serving food and drink much easier. Similar concern for convenience dictated that private phone rooms and copy/work rooms were carved out near the various conference rooms, solely for use by visiting clients and opposing counsel. This type of smart, practical design is one of the things that makes the office much more than a pretty face.

One area of the office actually shrank as a result of the remodel. After years of watching law-reference materials migrate from paper to the Internet, the client decided to halve the library room and use the leftover space for litigation work



areas. Though relocating the library shelving was tedious because of code restrictions on aisle space, ceiling clearance and sprinkler locations, Carstenson says the newly gained work space was well worth it.

Books, though in decline as day-to-day references, are cleverly used as décor in the large reception area, as well. A granite-topped sideboard-cum-bookcase contains row upon row of serious-looking law books. Says Carstenson: "Since reference materials are available online, some books are now a décor item."

Gensler designated a very specific "conference zone" for the convenience of the firm's clients such as lobby, conference rooms and their attendant work areas.

Teamwork is tops

Gensler (www.gensler.com) has more than 2,000 employees in its 25 offices,

and its specialized divisions, such as the Professional Services Group that designed the Gibson Dunn office, allow Gensler to cater to client needs. According to Koplin, such focused divisions benefit both designer and client. Every week, phone conferences are held to discuss trends, challenges and solutions unique to the professional services arena. In addition to Koplin, the Denver team included Linda Nelson, principal in charge, and architects Jon Gambrell and William Frank. Two design committee members, Barbara Dunn, who is the firm-wide client manager for Gibson Dunn & Crutcher, and Carlos Pasada, are based in Los Angeles.

According to Koplin, "This communication helps us advise clients." Koplin believes that good design equals good business and "It's good for employees. You show them you care enough to create a good environment."

Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher's Carstenson certainly found value in Gensler's services. "Gensler was great. I can't imagine the project going any smoother. They really listened to our needs—which was critical because this was so customized."

This is indeed a remarkable project: responsive to the needs of the client, fair to the environment, impressive yet understated, modern and still classic. Gensler set for itself a difficult task—creating a design program that successfully marries completely remodeled and reconfigured public spaces with extant office and work spaces, without constraining the former or making the latter seem dated.

Well, the verdict is in. The Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher office achieves all that and more.

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