

Express *yourself*

Sheppard Mullin's
new River North office
promotes individuality

By Melissa Rubalcaba Riske



it is flexible. Washington, D.C.-based Alliance Architecture designed Sheppard Mullin's office for today's needs and the future. Alliance Architecture designed the law firm's Dallas and San Diego offices. While Alliance Architecture provides continuity among the Sheppard Mullin offices, there is ample room for the space to reflect the character of each specific location. Each office has unique features, according to Alliance Architecture Associate Principal Lauren Caraccio and Principal Tim Kearney, who were primary support for the Chicago office.

As visitors step from the elevator on the 31st floor, they'll see the firm's signage on a steel I-beam that's been painted white. Tucked off to the side of the reception area is a discrete area where visitors and staff can slip out of their rain or winter boots, a special accommodation for Chicago weather.

To the side of the reception area is a brand-new glass staircase with wooden steps, designed to provide an easy connection between the two floors at the heart of the office, Caraccio said.

EVERYONE HAS A PLACE

While unassigned office space may be a trend, Thomas said that Sheppard Mullin did not want it. Instead, the firm opted for individual offices.

"We said everyone is going to have an office," Thomas said. "People are more productive when they have a quiet space."

The offices of partners and associates are located along exterior glass walls while paralegals and support staff are housed in individual offices located on the interior of the floorplan. Large glass windows surround each office and provide natural sunlight.

"It is so important to let natural light into the interior space and to share (it) with everybody," Caraccio said.

Within individual offices are furnishings that can be configured to best suit the user as well as a palette of signature colors to accent

Cookie cutter offices won't cut it for Sheppard Mullin Chicago Office Managing Partner Liisa Thomas.

As she oversaw the design of the firm's new offices at 321 N. Clark Street, she had a vision for areas that provide optimum ability for work requiring solitude and intense concentration. Thomas' idea now provides Sheppard Mullin attorneys room to host large meetings in person and via videoconference. They can host after-hour events. They even have studio space for video interviews, podcasts and webinars.

"We want to provide a variety of spaces for people to do their best work, whether that is private offices for deep thinking-type work or gathering spaces like our music room and game room for collaboration," Thomas explained.

The new River North location, bathed in sunlight projecting itself through large windows, offers a workspace that is as beautiful as





the walls and furniture.

"You do better work when you are able to customize your space," Thomas said.

PASSION FOR INFORMATION

Thomas' knowledge of workspaces and efficiencies is more than a philosophy. She has a master's degree from Northwestern University in learning and organizational change. She pursued her master's because of her passion to support people, processes and behaviors. It's something Thomas can apply in her role as leader of Sheppard Mullin's privacy and cybersecurity team.

The floorplan consists of more than just a sea of offices. Its north and south corridors, the longest on the floor, have offices that slightly jut out to create angulation and prevent a tunnel effect, Caraccio explained.

Although the firm wanted glass doors on all offices to allow for natural light, it also wanted ample wall space dedicated to its art collection, featuring one-of-a-kind artwork from various artists and organizations such as Misericordia, After School Matters and Marwen.

The new office also has rooms designed for video and online streaming, which provide an optimum space for online interviews, programs and video court appearances. The rooms are equipped with quality sound features and a curated background that is simple to avoid distractions. In addition, all desks in the office are designed for both sitting or standing, giving the user a choice.

Sheppard Mullin also has four flex spaces, each with its own theme: library, music, café and game room. These flex spaces were created for group get-togethers, whether that involves work or a little fun. The spaces give a feeling of spending time in a friend's basement recreation room but with softer lighting and retro couches.

"The idea is to come and sit down and talk," Thomas said.

The music room has a record player, while the game room features electronic dart boards and a discretely placed stash of board games. These rooms, located in the interior, also have floor-to-ceiling wooden panels, which add privacy but keep the space slightly open.

"Everything was designed (so) this space can be used for more than one purpose," Thomas said.

Designing and planning for the new office during the post-pandemic months allowed the incorporation of concepts of greater flexibility and the notion that people aren't always tethered to their desk. Those working from home may have a home office but might answer their emails from the kitchen counter or outdoor patio via mobile devices. That flexibility was incorporated at Sheppard Mullin — people can work from their private spaces or grab a seat by the window and sip coffee.

"At home people move around all day. People are much more mobile than before because they have their laptops," Thomas said. "We learned from the pandemic that people can work from anywhere."

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