

Sheppard Mullin draws on San Diego's beach culture for remodeled space

By Jennifer Chung Klam

Special to the Daily Journal Staff Writer

SAN DIEGO – Sheppard Mullin's recent remodel of its downtown San Diego office addresses the realities of the post-pandemic work environment. While the 18th floor of 501 W. Broadway got its last major renovation in 2008, Sheppard's reimagined office boasts a more modern, collaborative and inviting space for its 68 attorneys.

"One of the key things a lot of folks talk about is the work from home aspect in the pandemic, and how that changed office culture. So, what we tried to do at this office is to make it a more pleasant place that entices people to come in and do the collaborative work that really makes our firm succeed," said Alejandro E. Moreno, the downtown San Diego office managing partner.

For those who prefer working from home, Moreno said it has been a challenge to get them back in the office three or four days a week. But that face time is essential, because "the way [junior associates] learn is by popping into the office of a more senior attorney and asking them questions, or being pulled in to do a project that comes up on the fly. If you're not there in person, you're not going to get those sorts of experiences," he said.

Glass partitions and open plans facilitate the "pop-in," added Colleen Syms, regional director of administration. Gone are the dark wood and solid walls of the traditional law office, in favor of dividers that let in light, foster communication and help create a more inviting workspace.



From left, Colleen Syms, Alejandro E. Moreno and Laura M. Nava | Thomas Kurtz / Special to the Daily Journal

"We do work as team here; we have very collaborative working groups, so this environment does help those groups because it's not so closed off. It's more inviting to come in and work together, and see your teammates," Syms said.

The redesign also offers more spaces for people to gather, including an open café, dedicated team rooms, new offices and workstations, and a flexible multipurpose space that can accommodate up to 50 people. Previously, for large meetings, the firm had to rent conference rooms on another floor.

Named in honor of the firm's chair emeritus, the new Guy Halgren café is right off the upgraded reception area. The café stocks an assortment of snacks and beverages - and even has beer on tap, Moreno said.

Studio Alliance Associate Principal Lauren Caraccio, who designed the hospitality-inspired remodel, said her goal was to bring brand consistency while allowing the local culture to shine through. The vibe is contemporary, with a mix of both classic and eclectic touches, and a nod to San Diego beach culture. With views of San Diego

Bay, the downtown office features beach-themed artwork from Bree Poort, and conference rooms named after local beaches.

Beyond aesthetics, the remodel underscores the high caliber of the firm, Moreno said.

"We are a cutting-edge Am Law 100 firm, and we're a growing firm," he said. "One of our guiding principles is to try and stay ahead of the curve, and I think the remodel itself is ahead of the curve. It has anticipated and dealt with issues coming out of the Covid pandemic and showcases the strength of our firm."