

Calners

INTERIOR DESIGN

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All About Office
NeoCon 2001

Office Space

Brayton & Hughes designs a global consultancy reflecting the history of Silicon Valley.

THE HISTORY OF their collaboration dates back almost eight years and began with the design of a private residence for a Californian who heads an international consulting firm. In this capacity, he later commissioned the same designer to do some work on two of his Los Angeles offices. More recently, he asked him to create his new headquarters in Palo Alto. The businessman withholds his company's name; the designers gladly flaunt theirs—Brayton & Hughes (B&H) of San Francisco, led on this job by principal Richard Brayton with associate Kelly Scott Hill.

The consultancy, Hill explains, had outgrown its former quarters but quickly found a coveted alternative: a 40,000-sq.-ft. bilevel structure owned by Stanford University. Double the previous location's size, the new place was chosen with expansion in mind. But with real estate costs soaring out of sight, plans called for subdivision and conversion to be implemented in extant spaces later. When the projected staff count passes a certain number, now-private offices will be shared, and meeting rooms will become reconfigured entities. As it stands, perimeter offices range from 80 sq. ft. to 225 sq. ft., and work →

Right: Looking along tapered passage to entry. Height to skylight is about 35 ft.

Opposite: Tree forms, sculptured of beech, line side of stairway. Cutouts in wall allude to '60s computer punch cards. Wall at left is of Venetian plaster.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JOHN SUTTON







stations cover about 88 sq. ft. There are no cubicles, the spokesman insists, only “small open offices.”

Hill recalls that early on, the client called an off-site staff meeting to review general preferences as perceived by personnel. As it turned out, findings had to do with amenities: just about everyone wanted exposure to daylight and views, many requested a kitchen, and a few asked for a “regal entrance,” a wish triggered, apparently, by the hard-to-find front door at the former site. There was no mention of how the new place should look or make one feel, which presaged open minds.

To celebrate and romance Silicon Valley’s spirit of invention while keeping alive its history of growth—that’s referring both to numbers and nature—became a prime objective, rivalled only by the resolve to let no one be without light and views. All, despite the hierarchical layout, are no more than 30 ft. away from windows; the skylight well funnels additional brightness.

Visually relating to present and past cybernetics are perforated metal ceilings with one-in. slits reportedly suggesting a random code language. Small rectangular cutouts in walls represent 1960s punch cards predating floppy computer discs. And “network-oriented” glass walls are covered with binary codes. “Every eight panels spell one letter,” and “eight digits become a piece of information,” says Hill by way of enlightenment. Linear-patterned carpeting is described as grid-like, hence associated with circuit boards.

Intended as a salute to the land’s topography is the array of eight—there’s that number again—beech-wood “trees” rising, like stylized sculptures, from the ground floor to form a trellised, arbor-like canopy above the stairs. The “trunks” start at the sides of work stations before branching out to shadow the entry lane. Further harking back to “the unspoiled nature of the Valley’s past” are rough quarried stone, Venetian plaster walls, etched laminate glass, and aluminum.

Cited for their contributions are principal Jay Boothe, Nina Chiappa, Lorissa Kimm, Lisa McClung, and Jacqueline Lyttle.

—Monica Geran