



WORK & PLAY

Jenner & Block revamps its office with health and wellness in mind

By Melissa Rubalcaba Riske

In today's workplace there are plenty of tools for success.

Up-to-date and easy-to-use technology is a must. Space to spread out and work collaboratively has been a major trend for years in new offices and those under renovation.

Then there are other considerations that don't fall into traditional boxes such as providing room for people to take a shower and change for work after a morning bike commute. Or a firm could provide a ping-pong table to allow attorneys to play, blow off some steam or brainstorm with a colleague.

When Jenner & Block began plans for its River North office renovation, it wanted its space to help attorneys reach top performance for their clients, according to Chicago Office Managing Partner Melissa Root.

Planning the office renovation was a multi-step process that began in 2019, but the pandemic forced the team to work over video conferences. Those video chats became an inspiration because it showed the firm what it really needed, according to Root.

"We thrive when we work together," she said.

NEW ERA

It has been 10 years since Jenner moved to 353 N. Clark St. Before that, the firm worked for three decades at the former IBM Building, 330 N. Wabash Ave. When Jenner moved to the newly constructed building on Clark Street, Jim Prendergast assisted with the architectural design. Today, Prendergast is a principal at global architecture firm Gensler and returned to assist the firm with its renovations because of his familiarity with Jenner's ideals.

Prendergast said the renovations exemplify the firm's timeless and classic feel while weaving in aspects that enable Jenner to remain nimble as its staffing needs evolve. There are now movable walls in its interior spaces to create offices and conference rooms.

"This offers the flexibility of space over time. This allows the firm to adapt to new trends," Prendergast said.

In addition to the main conference space on the firm's 45th floor, smaller interior conference spaces were created on lower floors, utilizing technology and taking acoustic measures to enable high-quality conference calls.

Another major factor of the renovation was being mindful of the materials used throughout the building. That includes incorporating the travertine stone which had been a part of the firm's decorative space since its time at the IBM Building and installing low volatile organic compounds paint and materials.

While the office renovation gave a fresh look to Jenner's office, there was an intentional effort to reuse as many materials as possible. Bob Dickinson, the firm's Chicago director of administration, noted the firm reused its sit-stand desks rather than purchase new units.

With the decision to consolidate two reception areas into one, the design team re-worked the former second reception area on the 45th floor into a hospitality counter, Prendergast said. The change fits well in the space and is adjacent to a large open area that can be used for entertaining clients and guests. It also can be divided from one large conference space into four conference rooms.

HEALTH AND WELFARE

The renovation was a chance for Jenner to improve its space to meet the needs of the team's health and welfare. It added gender neutral restrooms on all its floors. It also provided designated, private-access lactation rooms with sinks and storage cabinets.

Root said the office has many avid cyclists who prefer to bike to work, regardless of weather conditions. Jenner



also created locker rooms with showers and changing space. The firm hopes this further encourages exercise and active commuting options.

Although Jenner's designated lunchroom remained an interior space with no access to natural light, Prendergast added special backlighting that creates the effect of sunlight. Also, one of the walls has a full-size vinyl mural of Lake Michigan by a Chicago-area photographer. The photo shows the horizon meeting the water and

evokes a peaceful scene, while also giving a nod to Jenner's environmental practice, Prendergast said.

One of the highlights of the renovation was the creation of "The Lounge," an interior space complete with two large-screen televisions, billiards table, ping-pong table and lounging areas to work or mingle. It provides a casual in-office location to meet and discuss work. Root said a recent ping pong tournament was incredibly fun and connected the staff.

"From meeting in a group to brainstorming in the space, we created a more natural space for that to happen," Root said.

To help control the room's acoustics, Prendergast had the ceiling tiles removed, interior pipes and duct work painted black and coated in sound-proofing material before adding an acoustic wood ceiling to finish the look.

"This composition renders a more casual tone to the room and conveys the intent for this area as a more informal space," Prendergast said. "It gives a playful sensibility."

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Photos by Rena Naltsas

