

TCA'S REFURBISHED OFFICES ON JAMES ST. NORTH INCORPORATE 15-FOOT SKYLIGHTED CEILINGS, WOODEN FRAMING AND FLOORING, ALONG WITH INCREASED COMMUNITY SPACE AND A NON-HIERARCHICAL LAYOUT.

OFFICE SPACE

Innovative, inspiring and functional, the modern working environment is getting an innovative overhaul *By Wendy Peters*

There was a time when office space was just that: a space to be filled with workers. It was all very institutional—the boss in the big, windowed corner office; the workers in their cubicles. This was hardly an atmosphere to stimulate the creative juices or prompt original thought. Fortunately for the worker bees, those days are in the past and the future of corporate office design is looking far more exciting.



BILL CURRAN

For example, Thier & Curran Architects Inc. (TCA) is refurbishing the interior of the Lister building for the City of Hamilton's Community Services Department and Tourism Hamilton. Gone are the hierarchical space assignments awarded by company position or the office-versus-workstation quandary. There will be extra community space in lieu of larger personal space.

"There are very few personal offices and none of them have windows," explains TCA's Bill Curran, who cites the model as being among the best principles in contemporary office design since egos and seniority aren't involved. "We have corridors along the windows, so you have a very democratic access to light and view. It's refreshing to work on a project like that."

Curran has been seeing a trend toward renovation versus new construction and believes the shaky economy has played a partial role in tandem with other factors. "People are looking for character and quality in their environment like never before and old buildings offer that."

TCA's newly renovated digs at 118 James Street North in Hamilton are a prime example of this economically viable trend. They stretch along 5,000 square feet of space on the third floor, with soaring 15-foot ceilings that include skylights. TCA has retained the 120-year-old building's brick walls, wood floors, exposed wooden framing, some steel beams and cast iron columns, and the result is a spectacular mix of old and new. The company bought the building as a long-term investment at a cost of about \$700,000. In addition, Curran said they spent \$2.3 million on base building renovations; their offices cost an extra \$150,000.

Their future lies in the past

For Jeff Feswick, president of Historia Restoration, the idea of a long-term investment became personal. He purchased Treble Hall on John Street North in Hamilton for \$735,000, with the price tag expected to rise to around \$3 million by the time of completion.



JEFF FESWICK

The building was constructed in 1879 and developed by noted architect James Balfour. The name Treble Hall derives from one of its many owners, but Feswick plans to keep it because he likes the musical overtone. He purchased the building when it was derelict and began the long deconstruction process—pulling apart all the interior features.

"In April 2011, we discovered baseboards, doors, door frames and panels and kept them for re-use and tore down the laths and plaster," says Feswick, whose plan is to remove the floor between the third and fourth storeys, which was added around 1910, and turn it back into a big hall as a

tribute to Balfour's original design. The resurrected space will attract businesses and organizations that can rent it for a variety of functions such as seminars or after-hours events. The second floor will be reserved for the entertainment industry or perhaps a restaurant, and the ground floor will consist of storefronts.

"I will maintain the building and lease out the different parts," says Feswick, who is also reworking the Pagoda building next door. He estimates a summer 2013 completion date for the entire project.

Another trend with traction is shared space. Young investors are looking at this as an opportunity to provide affordable space for new businesses and as a one-stop shop for same-industry firms. Sandy Alfonsi has provided just such



SANDY ALFONSI

a service for financial needs that would complement her own insurance company, Alfonsi-Torosantucci Insurance Ltd.

"I looked at all the services and professionals required to really make that happen and it made sense to me to bring them all under one roof so we would be the most convenient offering in the marketplace," says Alfonsi. The Financial Wellness Centre was born and opened on Sept. 30 at 236 Pritchard Road in Hamilton. The purchase of the building, renovations and related costs amounted to a "seven figure" deal, Alfonsi confirms.

Her vision is ultimately to include tax specialists, lawyers (estate planning, wills, power of attorney), mortgage specialists and an accountant—"anyone who can offer advice for building and collecting wealth."

In addition, Alfonsi says the centre is there to cater to small business. "Individuals or companies can have the use of all our facilities and the services we offer," she says.

There are three ways to be part of the Financial Wellness Centre: renting space through membership, renting exclusive space or in a one-off situation. The centre would also be an ideal location for satellite offices, suggests Alfonsi. "We have designed it as turnkey, with your own entrance, security and use of the common area."

Joe Accardi was also eager to provide affordable office space for young entrepreneurs. He created Platform 302, which offers shared spaces for companies 10 years or younger—including services, boardrooms and offices—for similar-minded entrepreneurs who will be focused on growing their companies and keeping costs down.



JOE ACCARDI

He also anticipates plenty of collaboration and sharing between companies.

Accardi purchased and renovated an older building on Hamilton's Cumberland Avenue. The costs incurred included an estimated \$75,000 for deferred maintenance, \$75,000 of leasehold improvements and \$50,000 for furniture and accessories. He anticipates moving in by mid-November.

Companies will not be welcome indefinitely, though, says the 26-year old businessman. "When a company is 10 years old, they move out. We want them to grow out of the building and move on to buy their own buildings."

The charges for shared space will vary according to

THE OFFICES OF DAVID PREMI'S ARCHITECTURAL FIRM, HOUSED IN A BUILDING THAT DATES TO 1859, FEATURE EXPOSED BRICK, ORIGINAL PINE SUBFLOORING AND GREAT VIEWS OF THE URBAN THEATRE ON THE STREET BELOW.





MAYHEW'S DESIGN OF TRIVARIS' NEW OFFICES AT McMASTER'S INNOVATION PARK PROVIDES AN OPEN-SPACE ENVIRONMENT THAT FOSTERS COLLABORATION AMONGST SEVERAL SMALLER COMPANIES SHARING A COMMON SPACE.

The inside word on interior design

Mayhew, a Southern Ontario interior design company with offices in Stoney Creek, validates the significance of the many trends toward a healthy, friendly workspace. Simply redesigning an office can make a critical difference in staff attitude, but it can also help attract and retain good people by providing a distinctive and superior environment.

Mayhew has found a mixed clientele in the Golden Horseshoe; among them corporate, health care, municipalities and financial services, all with distinct requirements.

"We try to understand what the business needs and do a

feasibility or exploration study to determine those needs, its culture, brand and motivation," explains Steve Cascone, V.P. of Consulting Services.

To create a budget, Cascone must first identify and understand the client's requirements, then create a budget for interior fit-out, which is designed to open plan (bare floors and walls). Design costs can be as low as \$30/sq. ft. or as much as \$80/sq. ft., depending on size and the finishes selected. The latter play a key role in pricing, says Cascone.

Paul Bradshaw, general manager of Mayhew's Golden Horseshoe office, has recently

seen more clients asking for help with existing space.

"People are adapting to the current economic situation," he says. "There is a need for collaborative space, space that will attract and retain employees."

Like Hamilton's Thier & Curran Architects, Mayhew prefers to design private offices in the interior space available, with common areas along the windows. This opens up space for natural light, another modern trend. "People want a more flexible environment with architectural solutions," notes Cascone. Workspaces can now accommodate the different work modes and various age groups working today, from baby boomers to Generations X and Y.

"Today's workspaces are highly connected and collaborative," adds Bradshaw, who notes that company leaders are both more involved and collegial these days.

Staying healthy

According to Cascone, healthy, flexible and adaptable workplaces and ergonomically sound designs are also in vogue.

"We want to create an environment people can enjoy," explains Cascone, who cites a growing movement toward a green environment. "You can't build a government building without Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) nowadays."

The private sector is under a misconception that being green is more expensive, Cascone notes. But it's not the case now since suppliers are mostly current with green products, he says.

Also green is Mayhew's SmartSpace program, which allows clients to return products instead of directing them to landfill. "There are many great products that can be refurbished," he says, "and it can be very cost-effective."

needs, from the lowest rate for one desk with limited hours at \$75/month, to a more private desk at \$300/month. Offices will range in size from 5' x 10' to more than 10' x 10'.

Accardi hopes to attract those people who don't like working from home but face cost challenges when searching for a place to work. "We're trying to attack costs, and everyone should pool their resources and make it affordable."

Accardi says he wants to mould Platform 302 on the Google model by providing various amenities in the building—yoga, a theatre, a gym and more. "With a full-resource building, we're trying to attract and retain high quality people."

Inspiring innovation and collaboration

While a stuffy office can curb your enthusiasm and stifle imagination, a fresh, new working environment can be good for the soul simply by lowering barriers to creativity, notes Debra Pickfield. As the owner of ThinkSpot, she has created a business that counters the effects of sterile workspaces by helping people think and engage differently.



DEBRA PICKFIELD

"We host and facilitate meetings to encourage collaboration and innovation," says Pickfield. She and her "Sherpa guides" teach clients to allow their brains to let go of filters and barriers so they can become more creative.

For her inspiring offices, Pickfield selected a house on Locust Street in Burlington, originally built in 1890. Then she overhauled the entire main floor. "We invested approximately \$40,000 to renovate and design," she notes. "In our case, we worked with the existing structure, as it had great bones. When I looked at it, I knew it could embrace the whole self."

The 1,900 sq. ft. space includes six rooms (three for larger groups and three for more intimate sessions), a patio, a kitchen and some unusual paraphernalia Pickfield has assembled to stir the creatives juices: a ping-pong table, crayons, sand to draw in and a tickle trunk full of costumes and wigs, all intended to inspire silliness or whatever else is needed to motivate inventiveness and collaborative ideas.

Many companies just need a change, and a fresh, contemporary working environment was exactly what David Foreman had in mind when he moved his company, LakeStreet Communications, to its new John Street South location. It's another old building in Hamilton's downtown core on its way to being completely renovated.

"We were looking for space that reflected the creative industry we're in," Foreman explains. It didn't take long. Foreman asked the landlord to gut everything up to the walls and provide a floor plan. Then he and his staff designed the offices from scratch, maintaining the original wooden beams, laying down engineered hardwood floors and using glass walls to complement the open-plan design. New furniture became necessary to harmonize with the exciting modern environment LakeStreet now calls home.

Foreman said even though his leasing costs are a little higher at the new location, he pays it willingly. "We deal with a cross-section of clients, and our offices reflect who we are."

A stable market and growing options

While there are economic jitters worldwide, including concerns over the real estate market, Hamilton finds itself in an enviable position, says Bruce Law, a broker at Royal LePage

State Realty. "We haven't seen new construction lately, but we have seen reinvestment and new people coming in," notes Law, who attributes most new business to expansions, downsizing or people seeking a better deal.



BRUCE LAW

Among the new arrivals is animation company Pipeline Studios, which bought a 16,000 sq. ft. facility at the corner of Main St. West and Queen, and a business school, the National Academy of Health and Business, at 31 King Street East.

Fortunately, most of the shareholders appear to be of like mind regarding the trends in office space. Architects are aiming to maintain the beauty, character and physical structure of older buildings while still creating a contemporary work environment, while tenants and landlords are maximizing existing space and making it flexible and enjoyable.

An uncertain economy is partly responsible for many of these new trends, but in every instance, the comfort and productivity of staff is also a major consideration.

"Today's offices look a lot different than they have traditionally. There's a trend toward collaborative workspaces and fewer partitions, which allows for more natural lighting and better airflow," says David Premi, proprietor of dp.Ai Architects Inc., echoing the sentiments of TCA's Bill Curran. "Everyone has a job to do, but they're also working together. Space can change attitudes. When your door is closed all day, it can be intimidating to approach you. It's also more economical, since less money is being spent on infrastructure!"

"But there's another great trend, too," Premi explains. "People used to cover up walls with drywall to make it look new. Now they're stripping it away to reveal the history of a building, which often has a great story to tell."

"So we're not just making better connections with each other, but with our cultural heritage as well."

BIZ



HAMILTON'S HISTORIC TREBLE HALL IS BEING RECLAIMED—AND REWORKED—INTO INNOVATIVE SPACES FOR BUSINESS.