

COOLEST OFFICE SPACES

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Companies use innovative office designs to inspire employees

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Cooler Office Spaces, a *TBBJ* feature now in its third year, is dedicated to recognizing the "cool" in Tampa Bay area offices.

This year's spaces prove that cool is an ever-evolving concept, one that in 2010 departed from conventional design concepts and restored the notion of fun in the workplace.

Companies are choosing bright colors to liven up the mood and original artwork, in some cases created by the owners.

Owners favor collaborative, open environments that foster communication and camaraderie.

Best of all, these spaces prove that cool doesn't have to break the bank.

VAKA LAW GROUP GIVES CLIENTS SOMETHING TO REMEMBER

Tampa law firm Vaka Law Group PL has taken bold steps with modern furniture, bright colors and pictures of Bob Dylan, the Allman Brothers Band and Nat King Cole.

"Gone are the traditional, staid fox hunting scenes and garish furnishing," said Administrator Shaun Spurgin Vaka.

In remodeling 4,663 square feet on Harbour Island, the goal was to create a place where the firm's 10 employees would look forward to coming to work each day, Spurgin Vaka said.

She and Owner George Vaka created the design concepts, with guidance from Storr Office Environments and architect Gresham Smith and Partners.

"We traveled back and forth between here and New York, and took some ideas with us," she said.

An HDTV and a library of music DVDs complete the mood. "Nobody is going to forget this law firm," Spurgin Vaka said.

GRAFEX DESIGN EMPLOYEES LOOK FORWARD TO MONDAYS

The Ybor City offices of advertising, marketing and design agency Grafex Design of Tampa Inc. may set a new standard for cool. Owners Spyro Marousis and Kathy Stack wanted to create a "fun, creative, hip" environment for their team when they relocated in March 2008, said Account Executive Jessica Spadaro-Acevedo.

The firm's 12 employees now have access to pool tables, video games, and a refrigerator stocked with snacks and soda.

"The creative minds need fuel to keep the creative juices going," Spadaro-Acevedo said. In an upbeat environment, employees are less likely to call in sick, which creates a return on investment.

The 4,000-square-foot cool space makes an impression on clients, too.

"They see that when they are working with us, it's a one-on-one relationship," Spadaro-Acevedo said.

The offices overlook the trolley and Centro Ybor and provide plenty of opportunities for people watching.

DESIGN-BUILD FIRM BRINGS OFFICE WORKERS INTO NATURE

Bright, collaborative and natural are words Chairman Randy Simmons uses to describe the offices of his design-build firm R.R. Simmons Construction Corp.

Here glass walls create an open environment where designers and builders can

architect of record for the project, which was completed in March 2009.

OPEN SPACES EASE COMMUNICATION AT POSTCARDMANIA

Postcard direct mail marketing company Postcardmania bills itself a "leader in innovation."

run of business, and the layout reflects this. A receptionist in an elevated station rotates calls to sales reps in an open area below.

"Our space keeps our staff upbeat and proud," wrote Joy Gendusa, founder and CEO. "Higher morale means higher production."

FLORIDA BUSINESS INTERIORS LIVES IT, NOT JUST TALKS IT

Full-service furniture dealer Florida Business Interiors-Tampa Bay has a lot to live up to.

"People see us more than just an office furniture dealership and more of a resource to demonstrate flexibility in real estate," said President Kevin Baker.

Customers, architects, designers and real estate professionals are always in and out of the 5,000-square-foot facility, where sales, design assistance and project management take place.

Based in a late-1800s-era Ybor City facility, the office showcases the firm's sustainable, modular approach to building out real estate, Baker said.

The walls and furniture are modular, meaning the company can change it around without calling an electrician.

The system will pay for itself the first time the firm rearranges or moves, Baker said.

PLASTIC SURGERY OFFICE SOOTHES

Patients come to Lakewood Ranch Plastic Surgery not just for aesthetic treatments but also for surgical procedures, family medicine and preventative services.

The goal for every patient is a soothing, spa-like experience, said Dr. Andrea Kreithen, who runs the office along with her husband, Dr. Joshua Kreithen.

The 3,800-square-foot Bradenton office includes natural materials and original artwork by the doctors.

Energy efficient design lowers utility bills, while the natural light elevates the mood for the doctors, staff of seven and patients, Kreithen said.

'HIGH-TECH, REFINED SIMPLICITY' A THEME AT CANTOR PARTNERS

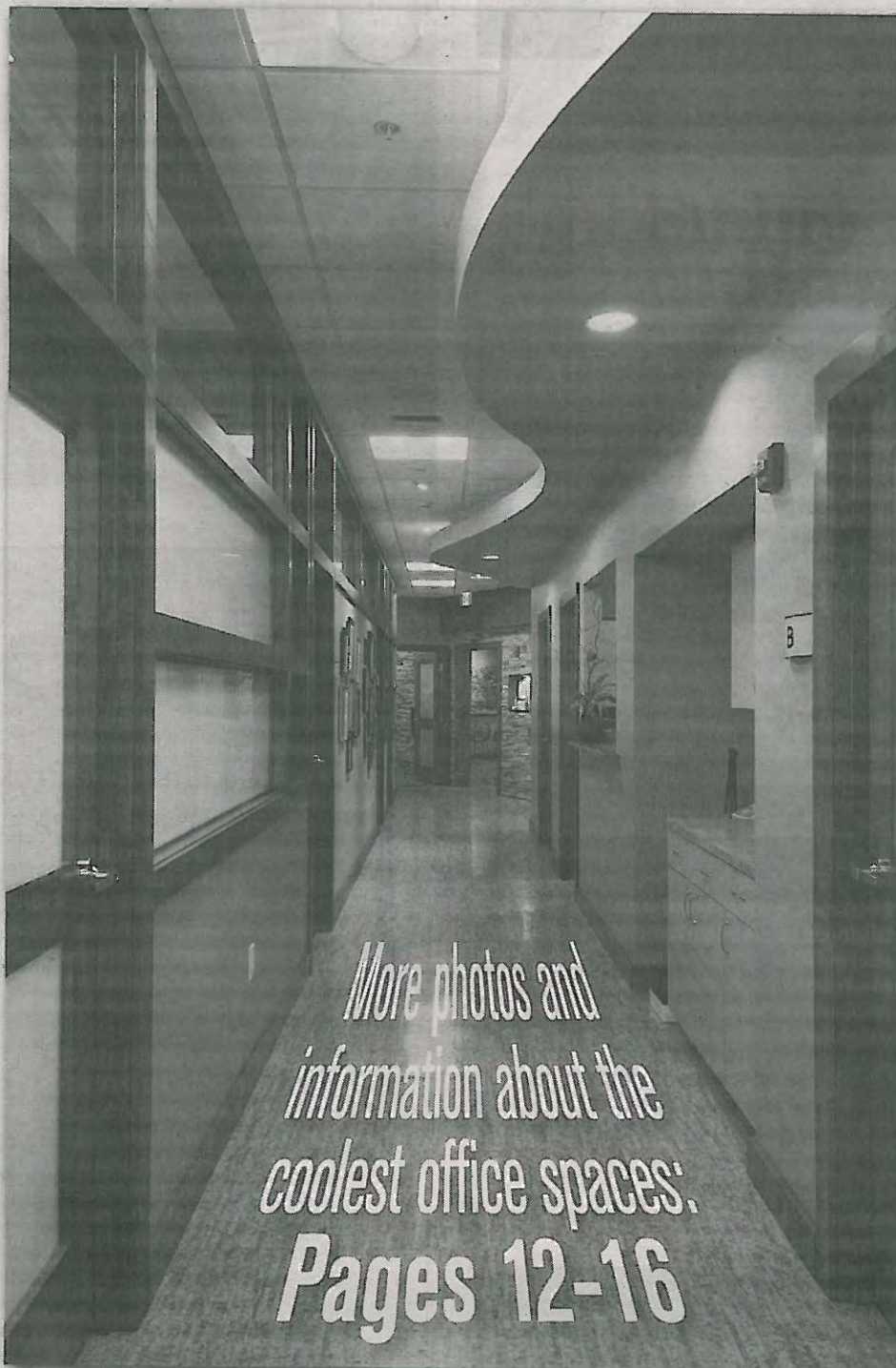
Cantor Partners considers itself a state-of-the-art real estate development firm.

Based in Signature Place in St. Petersburg, a 36-story condominium tower that Cantor developed, the firm's office reflects this message of building "timeless works of art."

The 1,880-square-foot office was built as new construction along with Signature Place, and has been home to the firm's four employees for a year and a half.

The layout is open and transparent with only a couple of glass walls. It includes state-of-the-art audio and visual systems and a 60-inch plasma TV. The conference room overlooks a 58-foot-high "water wall."

"We don't derive any pleasure doing anything that everyone else does," said Joel Cantor, founder.



More photos and
information about the
coolest office spaces:
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PHOTO BY CARLSON KREITHEN

For more about Lakewood Ranch Plastic Surgery, see Page 14.

work side by side.

The offices are located on the Hillsborough River in Tampa so R.R. Simmons' 15 employees can watch canoes and wildlife pass by. The building is 25,000 square feet, but about 6,000 square feet was left in "shell condition" for future growth.

R.R. Simmons was the builder and ar-

The firm of 160 has applied that philosophy to its 24,500-square-foot Clearwater offices, which it built from the ground up in May 2009.

"It's a very open, laid out plan," said Public Relations Director Ferris Stith.

Inbound calls from customers — to the tune of 600 a day — are important to the



PHOTOS BY KATHLEEN CABBLE

FLORIDA BUSINESS INTERIORS

NUTS AND BOLTS

Square feet: 5,000

People employed there: 14

Based here since: Opened in November 2007 with a complete new interior build-out

Outside firms enlisted: Chancey Design Partnership, Michael Young Construction

THOUGHTS AND SPECIFICS

Describe your office in three words: Innovative, energetic, creative

What sets your office apart from others: Our office was built out using a completely modular approach. We started with raised access floors and put all of our utilities (voice, data, power, plumbing and sound masking) under floor on a modular basis. The walls for our break and conference space are completely demountable. And of course our furniture is completely modular.

How your office helps your company achieve its goals: It has helped us demonstrate a completely sustainable, modular approach for building out real estate, adding to its value. ... Because of that, people see us more than just an office furniture dealership and more of a resource to demonstrate flexibility in real estate. It has also been an incredible attraction tool for hiring the area's top talent.

How your investment in the space is providing a return to the bottom line: Most everything we did in our space is considered personal property versus built in place, fixed construction. As such, we are able to depreciate a large portion of our build-out in five years versus traditional construction, which is 39 years. We also believe that we have gained several large customers because they see us different from those in our industry.



CANTOR DEVELOPMENT

NUTS AND BOLTS

Square feet: 1,880

People employed there: Four

Based here since: One and a half years

Outside firms enlisted: Cantor Partners, Bovis Lend Lease (Tampa office), Studio M

THOUGHTS AND SPECIFICS

Describe your office in three words: High-tech, refined simplicity

What sets your office apart from others: The conference room looks out on to the world's largest man-made waterfall.

How your office helps your company achieve its goals: Being in real estate development, we find it necessary to showcase our talents through our office. Every individual who walks through the door can see that our office is a reflection of our development experience.

How your office reflects the message of the company: We consider ourselves state of the art in real estate development, therefore our office space reflects our message of building "timeless works of art."

How your investment in the space is providing a return to the bottom line: We bring clients to our space, which shows them that we are not an overnight operation.

What's one "cool" thing you still want to do with your office when you can in the future? Extend the space into a larger office without losing the cool feel that we already have.



PHOTOS BY DAVID K. WITTY



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GRAFX DESIGN OF TAMPA



GRAFX DESIGN OF TAMPA

NUTS AND BOLTS

Square feet: 4,000

People employed there: 12

Based here since: Grafx has been at the new office location since March 2008; office was completely remodeled.

Outside firms enlisted: Grafx' owners Spyro Marousis and Kathy Stack designed the office space and a local architect provided the plans.

THOUGHTS AND SPECIFICS

Describe your office in three words: Modern, fun, creative

What sets your office apart from others: Our office was designed for our employees, giving them the creative atmosphere they need. Our office has a pool table in the loft - used for relaxing or meeting to go over new fun creative ideas. The loft is also has a hangout area to kick back, watch TV or play Wii. Our generous owners stock our kitchen with food, snacks, soda and any other snacks our staff might enjoy. The creative minds need fuel to keep the creative juices going.

How your office helps your company achieve its goals: Our office shows we're a creative team and we like to take things to the next level.

How your office reflects the message of the company: Our office reflects our company message and showcases the work we can provide to clients. Our clients love our website and design capabilities, but when they come to the office we hear them say, "Wow you guys really know what you're doing." Our design capabilities and our office go hand and hand, the atmosphere that you need to succeed is all around us on a daily basis.

How your investment in the space is providing a return to the bottom line: Grafx' new office and investment is definitely providing return to the bottom line. With an upbeat office and creative atmosphere our employees are less likely to leave Grafx, call in sick, etc. Grafx has two employees who have been with the company for 14 years.

LAKWOOD RANCH PLASTIC SURGERY

NUTS AND BOLTS

Square feet: 3,800

People employed there: 12

Based here since: November 2008

How recently did you remodel? Finished November 2008

Outside firms enlisted: Carlson Studio Architecture, RC Moore Construction, Norman Hervieux

THOUGHTS AND SPECIFICS

Describe your office in three words: Sustainable, natural, relaxing

What sets your office apart from others: It is seeking LEED Certification. The spa-like environment is unique to the typical doctor's office.

What does your office have that we might not find elsewhere? Curved stone wall, water wall, original artwork by the doctors

How your office helps your company achieve its goals: As physicians, we strive to heal people. Having a healthy, relaxing, beautiful environment immediately puts people more at ease, which in turn helps us to achieve our goals - confidence, comfort and health.

How your office reflects the message of the company: Our mission is to provide the best possible experience in every way. Customer service, health and comfort are very important to us, and our office hopefully relays that message with great staff and a beautiful place.

How your investment in the space is providing a return to the bottom line: Energy efficiency results in lower utility bills, beauty and comfort, and light results in happier staff, happier doctors and happier patients.

What's one "cool" thing you still want to do with your office when you can in the future? We would like to paint more oil paintings.



PHOTOS BY CARLSON KREITHEN

