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LEAP Back-2-School Breakfast

OFFICE DESIGN TRENDS

by Vickie Schatz

In the last several years many of Kansas City's law firms have remodeled, moved or made significant upgrades to their offices. We asked members of KCMBAs Managing Partners' Committee to contribute to this article if their firm had upgraded its Kansas City office in the last few years. The ten firms listed below responded with information and pictures. What follows is a narrative of the upgrades as well as a few tips for those considering a new design.

The practice of law has changed dramatically and so have the innovations to law firm design. Current trends steer away from the mahogany walls, brass fixtures and the smell of leather-bound books of yesteryear. Trends today focus on 1) state-of-the-art technology, 2) people, not paper, 3) abundant natural light, glass walls and views, 4) function, comforts and health, and 5) a pop of color, a bit of beauty and the brand.

10 PARTICIPATING LAW FIRMS

Brown & Ruprecht, PC

14 attorneys/11 staff

Renovation completed February 2015

New design: Contemporary urban style using muted earth tones, warm woods, simple clean lines and open ceilings.

Bryan Cave LLP

66 attorneys/ 54 staff

Renovation completed: March 2014

New design: Modern aesthetic, yet warm and comfortable with high functionality. Perimeter offices reconfigured to allow daylight to enter interior work areas. Focus is on views.

Kutak Rock LLP

34 attorneys/30 staff

Renovation completed October 2014

New design: Contemporary, open-plan design with streamlined aesthetics and modern feel.

Littler Mendelson, P.C.

275 staff

Renovation completed July 2015

New design: Fosters an atmosphere of collaboration, innovation, connectedness and transparency, in a modern streamlined and untethered environment.

Ogletree Deakins Nash Smoak & Stewart, P.C.

22 Attorneys/26 Staff

Renovation completed June 2012

New design: Contemporary design is atypical for a law office and includes a more open feel from using natural light to provide a modern and inviting workspace.

Oswald Roam Rew & Fry LLC

7 attorneys/10 staff

Renovation completed 2015

New design: Warm and neutral, paying tribute to the classic colonial building structure, but more modern feel.

Seigfreid Bingham, P.C.

44 attorneys/23 staff

Renovation completed October 2014

New design: Modern, functional, open and light infused.

Spencer Fane Britt & Browne LLP

48 attorneys/73 staff

Renovation completed July 2015

New design: Elegant and flooded with natural light, but perhaps most important feature is the overall appearance is timeless.

Stinson Leonard Street LLP

176 attorneys/218 staff

Renovation completed: August 2014

New design: Crisp, clean, technologically progressive, bright but comfortable, vistas to the city for all. Open, but connected, functional workspace in a welcoming atmosphere.

Van Osdol, PC

14 attorneys/8 staff

Renovation completed October 2014

New Design: Modern, yet reasonable with an open feel and an abundance of natural light.

STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY

Today's firm is loaded with the latest technology for conducting business. Many firms are focusing on technology through paperless offices, mobile networks, large screen TVs for conferencing and collaboration, seamless Wi-Fi and high power mobile devices, that untether employees from the traditional work setting and allow them to work from anywhere.

All firms participating in this article made technology a primary focus of their remodel; upgrading telephone systems, installing secure firm and guest Wi-Fi and adding large screen TVs with video conferencing capability. For example, Oswald Roam Rew & Fry's improvements included an upgraded server and backup software to support their growing practice of e-filing. Siegfried Bingham's improvements included a new voice-over-IP phone system that integrates into employees PCs, dual monitors, Apple TV units and firm provided iPads and iPhones. Stinson used state-of-the-art design for integrated video and wireless audio, driven by high performance systems controlled at the room level using iPads for ambience and functionality and allowing multi-purpose support for both external and internal client needs.

Perhaps the most progressive approach is at Littler Mendelson, where the firm applies the untethered work approach to all staff (not just lawyers) in their Global Services Center by supporting portable technology that enables mobility within the office, allowing communication, collaboration, and data access from anywhere within the 53,000 square foot office.



Littler Mendelson offers a variety of work settings. Paired with wireless technology, the office truly embodies the philosophy of "anywhere working" proven to boost employee satisfaction.



Stinson's state-of-the-art conference rooms provide movable walls, chairs and tables that provide for ease accommodating many of the firm's meeting and gathering needs.

PEOPLE, NOT PAPER

Law firms of yesteryear were made for paper - primarily law books and client files—rarely for people. Workspaces were individual and attorneys were expected to be at their desks. Now, design trends foster collaboration and teamwork, while balancing the needs for personal think time and team time.

With a focus on people, the new law firm design provides options for many work locations within the office, many of which offer the casual atmosphere of a home office or coffee shop. Work can now be conducted at a firm coffee bar, break room, small meeting or “huddle rooms,” the library lounge (or “lounge-brary,” a new term reflecting the lounge-like furniture and coffee stations present in many pared-down law libraries).

The importance of an inviting break room has also grown significantly in the new design. As seen on the cover photo, Kutak Rock’s new break room claims the best view in the entire office and is designed so people actually use it. “The way it’s fun and inviting causes us to leave our desks and eat lunch together in a bright, happy atmosphere. We decked it out with a catering kitchen and special amenities that make it easy to entertain both small and large groups.” said Jay Selanders, Kutak Rock’s Managing Partner.

In recognition of this changing trend, Brown & Ruprecht doubled the size of its break room to facilitate informal meeting areas as well as all-firm gatherings. Bryan Cave also devotes significant space to its all-firm break room that provides sweeping views and daylight for all employees. The gathering space is utilized for dining, staff appreciation lunches, and other celebrations. Likewise, Spencer Fane constructed a state-of-the-art break room as a destination for employee collaboration, as well as a communal spot for meals and impromptu meetings and Littler offers a large café experience (a “destination hub”) in the heart of the space that facilitates informal cross-departmental collaboration.



Brown & Ruprecht doubled the size of its contemporary breakroom to create a welcoming meeting spot.



The existing Bryan Cave law library has been reconfigured to include informal meeting space with lounge furniture and coffee bar while still maintaining the traditional function of the firm’s library.

Van Osdol's reception area features abundant natural light, taking advantage of large windows, glass walls and views.



Spencer Fane's new reception area design moved away from stereotypical law firm design creating an open and inviting environment.

ABUNDANT NATURAL LIGHT, GLASS WALLS, & VIEWS

Utilization of more glass is a huge trend as it provides for more natural light, can take full advantage of views offered by the location and can also nurture connection and connectivity between colleagues. As a result, many firms are trading out dry wall for glass.

Van Osdol's incorporated this trend and their new office utilizes glass walls to offer a more open atmosphere and to allow natural light to all employees. Seigfried Bingham's glass wall offices are frosted, allowing sunlight into the interior of the space, while also providing visual privacy. Similarly, Brown & Ruprecht's new design includes interior glass panels providing natural light to the halls and work areas and their glass interior wall of the main conference room opens up the panoramic view featuring the Liberty Memorial and Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts. The trend of more glass has resulted in enjoyment by all law firm staff of increased natural light and some of Kansas City's finest views.

Kutak Rock's spacious lobby welcomes guests with streamlined aesthetics and a modern feel.



Ogletree Deakins' office provides an ergo friendly work environment and offers standing work stations.

FUNCTION, COMFORTS, & HEALTH

With all firms watching bottom lines as well as square footage, many are opting for spaces that can serve multiple purposes, while also providing a comfortable and healthy workspace.

A great example of multi-use space is found in Bryan Cave's reception lobby, that also doubles as their event space and their conference center features reconfigurable walls to maximize flexibility resulting in accommodations for as few as four people and as many as 200. Likewise, Spencer Fane and Seigfried Bingham's multi-purpose rooms can be split into separate rooms utilizing operable partition walls to accommodate a multitude of events and meetings.

Not only are the new law firm offices functional, they feature some of the comforts of home.

Ogletree Deakins's space is warm and friendly with the reception area providing a comfortable couch and chairs that could be found in your home. Van Osdol's lobby also provides comfortable furniture and easy access to glass-walled meeting rooms.

Employee health and wellness has also grown in importance. Ogletree Deakins and several other firms provide quiet rooms that can be used for lactation or for employees' privacy and comfort. Ergo friendly work environments and standing workstations have also grown in popularity, contributing to an increased focus on health and wellness.

A POP OF COLOR, A BIT OF BEAUTY, & THE BRAND

Finishing touches to today's law firm design include pops of color, well-placed art to add interest and personality and a focus on the firm's brand.

Several of the law firms contributing to this article focused on a neutral color palette, with pops of color. Stinson's new design includes colorful pillows in comfortable seating nooks that provides a feeling of hospitality more often associated with a luxe hotel than a law firm. Seigfried Bingham's reception lobby is a good example of use of color as well as interesting art to create energy and design interest. Oswald Roam Rew & Fry's use of art in its main conference room suits the building while adding personality to the setting.

It is now standard that a firm's logo is prominently featured in or around the reception area. Importantly, however, the law firm brand in the new design extends far beyond the logo. At the heart of it, law firm office space is an essential element of the law firm's brand. The tone, look and feel of the office, and how employees are functioning therein, can change the firm's morale, culture, and image.

Spencer Fane saw their remodel as an opportunity to reinvent the firm internally, to ensure their work space matches who they are as a firm with a goal of their new open, bright and collaborative design matching their philosophy of outstanding client service, progress, and partnership. ■



Siegfried Bingham's reception area features a custom designed locally crafted glass and wood desk.

NEW OFFICE DESIGN TIPS

- Investments in state-of-the-art technology should be a primary focus.
- Design common areas to include functions that support the work of the firm that can also double as alternative workspaces. Look to hotel lobbies for inspiration.
- Consider future-proofing your office by designing space that can easily grow, shrink or change function with changing needs of the firm.
- Consider a timeless color palate and furniture. Good decisions made now will ease the need for and extent of future improvements.
- Utilization of natural light and glass walls provide the option of using darker-patterned carpet, reducing cleaning and replacement costs over time.



Oswald's selection of the perfect art for its conference not only blends well with their historical building, but also reflects personality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Vickie Schatz is the Executive Director of KCMBA and KCMBF. Vickie oversees the development of programs and policies, provides direction to the Board of Directors, and supervises day-to-day operations for both organizations. Vickie practiced law in Kansas City for 16 years before assuming this post in 2011.