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# YOUR OFFICE, YOUR VALUES

words JANETTE CRAWFORD



**D**oes your office space need an update but you don't know where to begin? When it comes time to make those changes, Lisa Elkins, architect and founder of **2 Point Perspective** in Chicago, boils things down to a simple starting point for ensuring the update makes the right statement.

"First look at the company's values," she says.

From full-scale renovations to minor tweaks of your own, good interior design always starts with a conversation. "What makes that company unique?" she asks. "How does your office reflect the values you cherish most?"

## **WE VALUE: HOSPITALITY**

Kansas City interior designer Lisa Schmitz recently finished a job with **Prosperity Planning Inc.**, a financial planning firm in Riverside, Missouri. The firm wanted to create an atmosphere that would put its range of clients at ease.

"We gave it a residential feel with a cross between commercial and residential finishes," Schmitz says. The office's public space, anchored by a stone fireplace, opens to a kitchen. "The kitchen is the heart of the home, so we made it the heart of the office," she says. On the kitchen island sits a beverage center with an inviting pitcher of ice water ready and waiting for client use every day. For lighting she balanced overhead fluorescents with lamps and hanging pendant lights.

Kenny Dennis, a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-accredited architect at **TAParchitecture** in Oklahoma City, says he puts a lot of stock into good lighting. Not only can it impress guests but it can also have multiple benefits for the company, he says. For example, task lighting at each work station can allow for lower overhead lighting levels, which can result in lower energy bills

**1.1** The workstation space at TAParchitecture in Oklahoma City features a lighting design that helps the area stay bright and interesting. Light levels are controllable by each employee.

as well as improved well-being through giving employees their own controls. "If an individual feels like they have control over their space, they'll feel a lot happier in their workspace," he says.

### **WE VALUE: TRUSTWORTHINESS**

"For many professions it's not as important [for an office] to be memorable as it is [for it] to exude a kind of stability," says Renee Grissom, a Kansas City interior designer of 18 years and founder of **Renee Grissom Design Inc.** "You want to create a feeling that's conservative but successful, prosperous but not too prosperous. There's a certain amount of subtlety that I would encourage."

**2.1** The "peach pit" at TAParchitecture is an open common area for employees to relax and talk in an informal setting. The soft colors and natural light make it an ideal place to deal with stress.

For this look Grissom recommends timeless décor such as solid fabrics, leathers and a neutral color palette.

Schmitz seconds the motion. "At a bank you don't want to see **Ikea** furniture. They have to give the impression they'll be around forever,"





3.1



3.2

**3.1** The “brag wall” at Prosperity Financial Planning Inc. in Riverside, Missouri, gives visitors a quick glance at the company’s awards and achievements and offers plenty of room to expand.

**3.2** Interior designer Lisa Schmitz gave Prosperity Planning a residential feel, putting the kitchen at the heart of the office.



4.1

**4.1** An insurance professional's office in Kansas City, Missouri, demonstrates a conservative but successful feeling by using solid fabrics, leather and a neutral color palette.

*Photo by Peter Obetz Photography*

she says, which is why banks are traditionally constructed of brick and stone. "It gives an image of being stable."

In Chicago Elkins is currently working on a space for **Green Choice Bank**, a values-based banking option. The space is going for LEED Platinum-level certification. "Because it's a new way of thinking about banking, it can have a more modern space," Elkins says. But just like a traditional bank space, the furnishings and finishes tell a story of the bank's longevity. "They're going for a much fresher aesthetic, but it still has a quality that implies trust."

Air quality improvements, though not outwardly obvious, can be one of the most people-friendly enhancements one will ever make to an office. The **Environmental Protection Agency** (EPA) maintains that volatile organic compounds (VOC), which can cause both long- and short-term adverse health effects, are between two- and five-times higher in indoor air than they are in outdoor air.

These VOCs can be emitted by everyday items like cleaning supplies,

pesticides, furnishings and office equipment. They can also come in higher doses in occasional items like fresh paint and carpet adhesives.

#### WE VALUE: EXPERTISE

Dennis brings up a recent job he completed with Oklahoma City's **Visual Image Advertising**, a marketing and advertising firm. The office uses a small projection system to display images of its work on a screen, which shows guests recent work while alleviating the need to reprint or reframe portfolio items on a regular basis.

Similarly, Elkins' Green Choice Bank will use its physical space to tell clients about its expertise in its niche. "The space will educate everyone who walks in about how it's LEED Platinum, with signage that's part of the architecture of the bank," Elkins says. "Its clients will take home some ideas for their home rather than reading a magazine."

#### WE VALUE: CREATIVITY

According to Schmitz, a creative setting is one place in which trendy finishings and accessories can send the right message. "Right now we're seeing whites and grays with bright-colored accents, translucents and matte metal," she says.

Elkins is working on a conscientiously creative shared office space in Chicago that has been designed to incorporate reclaimed building materials from the **ReBuilding Exchange**, which rescues discarded materials from the waste stream and makes them available to the public for reuse. Both the shared office and the Exchange are managed by **The Delta Institute**, a nonprofit sustainable community enabler in Chicago.

"They're showcasing all of their materials in the shared office space while still looking professional, not shabby chic," Elkins says. One feature of the space will be reclaimed hardwood flooring that wraps up a wall and onto the ceiling. Another wall will use old windows as a display system.

"We bring sustainability to the table no matter what the project is," she says, adding that it's important to educate clients about how choosing environmentally friendly options will cost them less in the long term. "That's something they're always keen on." □

## CREATING OFFICE

### ATMOSPHERE

### PROSPERITY

### PLANNING INC.

by designer Lisa Schmitz  
Kansas City

2,415 square feet

Cross between home and commercial space with a kitchen at the heart of the office to put clients at ease

## GREEN CHOICE BANK

by architect Lisa Elkins  
Chicago

3,800 square feet

Modern aesthetic with furnishings that demonstrate longevity

### VISUAL IMAGE

### ADVERTISING

by architect Kenny Dennis  
Oklahoma City

10,000 square feet

Free-flowing, open work stations to maximize team building