



When the building was a tannery in the early years of its existence, and Front Street was on the waterfront, ships would tie up to this atrium space to unload. Now, the atrium is the first impression of this vibrant, creative firm that visitors and clients gain. It is also an area for staff social events. At one end, a section can be closed off with roll-down "garage doors" when used for formal meetings, for training and for staff to practice yoga and pilates.

Senior staff offices are enclosed by panel partitions with sliding glass doors. Here and elsewhere, suspended fluorescent lighting fixtures with a louver base are run off a track. Light levels can be controlled for each section. The ceiling had been painted black by the former occupant. This was retained as a neutral design element, and helps to produce a low light level comfortable for the staff who work at computers.



Creative capital

By Tom Kelly

Photography: Andrew Ross Photography

Redwood Custom Communications' offices foster creative work while being flexible for change in a volatile market

Redwood's strength is predicated on intellectual and creative capital — that means people and it's critically important to create an environment that is exciting for staff, and that is something we've accomplished within our space," Eric Schneider, president and CEO of Redwood Custom Communications told *CFM&D* following a tour of this marketing communications firm's downtown Toronto offices.

Also significant is that the company operates in an industry that, like any advertising agency, is subject to frequent change.

The challenge posed to the designers was to produce an office environment that caters to the needs of a variety of staff, from writers and graphic artists to people providing IT support, while providing flexibility for teams to grow and change as clients and clients' requirements fluctuate. This had to be accomplished in a historic building — the Beardmore Building on Front Street — that was originally a tannery and most recently a Steelcase showroom.

Staff needs foremost

Prior to moving to the building, Redwood staff were distributed across three downtown premises, which hindered the sense of community among staff and the informal interaction of staff. Staff needs were foremost in the decision to choose this location, according to Theresa O'Connell, vice president, human resources. Before choosing the building, she said, Mr. Schneider asked all employees their preference for a location, and the overwhelming option was downtown.

The location serves the needs of employees who travel from all directions around the city. On another note, the chic urban ambience of the area east of Yonge Street, close to two of Toronto's major theatres, complements Redwood's creative environment.

"At first glance, the space appeared to work very well," commented Carolyn Laidley Arn, vice president of business development for project and construction manager **Interior Dimensions**. "It had fantastic 'bones' and many elements of the previous build-out were retained but modified: it featured great lofty space, columns, hard-

wood, granite counters and fabulous detailing. . . Filling it with open workstations was going to be a challenge."

Creativity and new ideas and the highest quality in writing and artwork are essential for the magazines, advertising features, web pages, catalogs and other communications material the company produces for client companies operating in demanding and upscale consumer markets. One team is dedicated to magazines for Kraft Foods. Another produces a 1.5-million circulation magazine for the Canadian Automobile Association, part of CAA's marketing to attract and keep members. A third produces a life-style magazine for Sea Island Resorts in Georgia.

About 80 per cent of the space is occupied by creative teams, each dedicated to working for a specific client. All members of a team — writers, graphic artists, editors, creative directors, account directors — are housed together to promote collaboration; workstations for managers directing each team are larger and enclosed with higher partitions than those of other team members, to allow space and privacy for meetings. Workstations for team members are typically 40 sq.ft, and 54 sq. ft for managers.

Because clients' needs change in response to what are often volatile markets, "this fast paced environment needs to be flexible, open and quick to change," according to interior designer Susan Jefferson of **Smith Grimley Harris Design Partners**.



In the reception and other areas, columns have been turned into architectural elements with accent lighting and are used to define the space.

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