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Commercializing Design

Two Trends in Commercial Interior Architecture—LEED and Employee-Centered Design



Equitable Real Estate Company's bamboo floors and lighting exemplify LEED design. Photo courtesy R and R images

Interior designers are often consulted for their aesthetic expertise, vision and taste. However, interior designers are also interior architects, and as such, are commissioned to create highly functional and environmentally responsible spaces. Two current trends that speak to these needs are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification by the U.S. Green Building Council and employee-centered design.

LEEDing Design

Environmental responsibility has become a mainstream value and the topic is just as relevant in the commercial interiors industry. A high demand for green building expertise and LEED certification dictate specific elements be incorporated into commercial

projects. Designers utilize available resources, new techniques and innovative products to provide a valuable service, while doing their best to minimize carbon emissions released by a commercial space. Efficient space planning, sustainable materials selection and alternative lighting solutions are examples of methods used to satisfy the desire for responsible design.

An excellent way to maximize energy efficiency in a commercial space is by utilizing daylight. Natural light from perimeter windows decreases the need for additional lighting fixtures, thus reducing the amount of energy being used in the space. One design trend is to move the open office component of a space to the perimeter, allowing natural light to filter through the space creating a softer light and open feel. However, there can be challenges. The resulting soft light requires more task lighting. Meeting LEED standards in this scenario can be a struggle because the amount of energy used by lighting fixtures is limited. LEED design requires the use of fewer fixtures with lower lamp output and limited use time. Sensor controlled lighting can play an important part in managing the use time of lighting fixtures. Sensors detect the amount of sunlight in a space or physical movement and the lights respond by switching on or off.

Environmentally responsible materials are also red hot in commercial design. A vast array of new product innovations has been introduced into the market fueled by the interest in green building. Recycled materials such as wood, wall coverings, resin products, flooring, fabrics, and much more are contributing to the environmentally friendly work spaces of today. Paints and finishes engineered with plant-based formulas and low-VOCs (volatile organic compounds) are readily available and often requested as they offer durable finishes with minimum toxicity and odor. Sustainable



Urban Initiatives' bar area is great for employees looking for a place to relax. Photo courtesy DFDia

building materials such as bamboo, cork and recycled sheet materials are commonly used as flooring, cabinetry and wall coverings. Paperstone is a marvelous example; a recycled paper product that has been engineered into a material durable enough to be used as a countertop. Not only are these materials responsible, they are incredibly unique in appearance and spark conversation about the topic.

Employing Design

Another trend in commercial interior architecture is the integration of spaces designed to enhance the work experience. Companies, in an effort to attract and retain top talent, are working with designers to create environments that encourage employees to connect, bond and blow off steam. Employees are encouraged to interact, collaborate and simply hang out in coffee bars, café style dining areas and play areas fashioned with pool tables, ping pong and foosball. In these spaces, activities foster strong relationships allowing co-workers and clients to become teammates.

Urban Initiatives, also located at Hayden Ferry Lakeside, has plans for a bar area where employees and clients can have meetings, socialize and relax all the while enjoying the view of the water. DFDia also worked with Google to incorporate play areas, massage rooms, a game room, and a full service cafeteria with complimentary food and drinks into their new office space in Tempe. In an effort to be responsible, the existing ceiling and carpet were preserved reducing waste and environmental impact.

The Equitable Real Estate Company enlisted DFDia to design a café area and other relaxation areas into their office space at Raintree in Scottsdale and chose bamboo flooring, not only for its beauty, but also for its sustainable qualities. Savvy executives understand that by investing in the work environment, they are securing a long-term relationship between the company and the employee. By making a commitment to build responsibly, the company is giving employees something to be proud of. ■■■

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