

PROFILES

>>> meet the designers behind projects
featured in this issue



Michelle Romero and Amy Nieboer

Amy Nieboer, IIDA, LEED-AP
Michelle Romero, IIDA

DFD Interior Architecture project designers Michelle Romero and Amy Nieboer have collaborated on several projects for the Equitable Real Estate Company in metro Phoenix, including the firm's most recent office location, featured in this issue. The two interior designers come easily to their collaboration; Romero and Nieboer are contemporaries, having graduated within two years of each other at, respectively, the University

of Arizona and Arizona State University. Their backgrounds also bear similarities. Nieboer grew up in Michigan and, drawn to the arts, first studied architecture before switching to interiors. Romero, an Arizona native, also studied architecture, inspired in part by her father's upholstery and interiors business. The only time the two designers might experience a bit of friction would be in late November. Why? It's the annual football showdown between rivals U of A Wildcats and ASU Sun Devils.

PROJECT WALK-THROUGH

Equitable Real Estate Company Offices

Scottsdale, Arizona

AMY NIEBOER, IIDA, LEED-AP

MICHELLE ROMERO, IIDA

DFD INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE, Phoenix, Arizona

By Nora Burba Trulsson Photography by R and R Imaging

An angled reception desk greets visitors in the lobby. The glass wall suggests the look of water and separates the lobby from a conference room.





Location, location, location

is the real-estate mantra. And for a real-estate firm in Arizona, *the* location these days is in downtown Scottsdale's Waterfront development, smack dab in the middle of a newly found beehive of restaurant, entertainment, retail, residential and business activity.

The owner of Scottsdale-based Equitable Real Estate Company found a primo Waterfront spot for the firm's flagship office—12,500 square feet of third-floor space, with great views of city, mountains and the adjacent canal for which the development is named. To create a stylish office for some 80 employees, the owner called in the talents of a design team from DFD Interior Architecture, with whom he'd worked before on other office locales.

"We were asked to create something edgy and different," says project designer Michelle Romero, who

The line of the reception desk continues into a ceiling plane, which defines the seating area. Frosted glass provides privacy for adjacent offices.



An architectural glass wall borrows light from the lobby for a conference room.

teamed with project designer Amy Nieboer on the office. Says Nieboer, "Because we'd worked with the owner before, we knew what his likes were—that he enjoys the look of warmth and texture, the use of wood and water, and that he wants colors to be muted, not bright."

Before Nieboer and Romero could pick colors and materials, they had to create a floorplan that could accommodate 40-some workstations and more than 30 private offices, in addition to a reception area, conference rooms, storage and a break room.

"One of the aspects that the owner liked about the office space was its 360-degree views of Scottsdale," says Nieboer. "He liked that those views would make an impression on clients."

Preserving those views, says Romero, and fitting the employees within the space became the challenge in creating the floorplan. "We placed the private offices in the interior of the floorplan," Romero says, "and we angled them so that each one had a glimpse of views." Conference rooms were also placed in the middle of the floorplan. The workstations, separated by low partitions, were placed on the outside of the plan, along with a perimeter walkway around the entire office. The floorplan, says Romero, allows everyone, including passersby, views through the windows. "The break room is set along the windows," says Romero. "We put a counter in there that allows everyone to sit and have a view."

Keeping an eye on budget, Romero and Nieboer placed design emphasis on the lobby and conference areas, but carried elements throughout the entire office. They designed a dramatic entry element of a suspended ceiling plane that

angles down into a reception desk, creating a sheltered seating area for the lobby. "We also played with ceiling planes throughout the office," explains Nieboer.

Chosen materials reflected the owner's taste and the office culture of style and elegance. Espresso-stained, hand-scraped walnut flooring was used to underscore the lobby and to serve as the perimeter walkway past the offices and workstations. The lobby's suspended ceiling and reception desk were covered with a wood veneer wallcovering by SanFoot, a cost-effective alternative to wood. While the owner likes water features, having a water feature in a third-floor office had its drawbacks, so the design team instead suggested art-glass partitions that mimic the look of water between the lobby and conference rooms. Additionally, the designers used striped patterns of frosted film on larger expanses of interior glass to provide privacy.

Furnishings and workstations for the new office came from the firm's previous offices. Their sleek lines and neutral colors work well in the new scheme. Recessed lighting was used throughout most of the space, and was installed gallery-style to highlight custom artwork.

The office project was started and completed in 2006. For Nieboer and Romero, the satisfaction comes in knowing the client has a stylish, functional office space in the right location. ■

Interior architecture: DFD Interior Architecture, Phoenix, AZ; (602) 381-4850 or www.dfdia.com.

Builder: NB Interiors, LLC, Tempe, AZ; (480) 889-5959 or www.nbinteriorsllc.com.

Lighting: R.C. Lurie Co. Inc., Phoenix, AZ; (602) 258-2400 or www.rclurie.com.