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OFFICE SPACE

TEAR DOWN THIS WALL

A Winnipeg architecture firm's makeover features open spaces that foster collaboration
BY BRYAN BORZYKOWSKI

For the last several years, Winnipeg's Number Ten Architectural Group has been telling clients that open spaces, natural lighting and collaborative workplaces are in vogue. But, up until a year ago, the company wasn't practising what it preaches.



LAST OUT

Number Ten's office is located in the city's Exchange District—a National Historic Site built between 1880 and 1913—and it hadn't had a significant renovation since the 65-year-old company moved into the space in 1982. It had bland cubicles and glassed-in offices for its partners, while architects were separated from each other by a wall, making collaboration difficult.

In 2017, the company decided that a makeover was due. "We were fighting against the layout," says Greg Hasiuk, a partner and practice leader at the firm. They had recently hired Genevieve Bergman, an interior designer who worked at global architecture firm Gensler, to oversee the office redesign—a lot of pressure given she'd just joined the company a few months earlier. But when Bergman and her small team asked the rest of the 65-person staff what they wanted, everyone was on the same page. "They wanted more light and more collaboration space," says Bergman. She also asked them to bring in pictures of their "happy place" for inspiration. One staffer brought in a picture of a bathroom. (And they did end up redoing the bathrooms.)

After about a year of planning and six and a half months of construction, during which they had to move into a cramped, temporary space that they dubbed Camp 10, their newer, brighter and more open-concept office opened. Now, employees have more workspace options, including 10 closed meeting rooms, up from four in the previous space. Bergman also created three new open meeting areas out of the glass and large rough-cut cedar trim that made up five closed-door offices in the old space.

Almost immediately after the company moved in, collaboration increased, while staff felt more energized and excited to come to work, says Hasiuk. The reno is the biggest investment the company has made in itself, costing about \$1.8 million, not including relocation fees, but it was worth it. "It pays off through better engagement, better retention, and it's a marketing tool," he says. "We can finally show off our space to our clients." ♦



A brick wall once separated the front desk from the rest of the office, but no longer. The large, open-concept reception area features custom-designed lightboxes covered by fabric photos of some of the company's most notable projects, including Bell MTS Place, where the Winnipeg Jets play, and The Forks Market redesign.



While the firm has 10,000 square feet of space on the main floor, there's another 2,000-square-foot office area on the upper level where the company's accountants sit, including Michael McPherson, CPA and director of finance. The floor also acts as a library and "maker space," where teams can spread out blueprints and other designs.



Michael McPherson, CPA and director of finance



The workplace café's large windows give people a good look at the Exchange District's historic views. The custom-made "Create Your Life's Work" art piece speaks to the idea that work should be more than just a job.