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LA

# ARCHITECT

DEMOLITION

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*"Great design, but, when the time comes, a bitch to implode."*

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## Team 1

**THE LONGEVITY OF A PIECE OF ARCHITECTURE** is frequently a matter of style rather than structure or materials. All the more so in the case of interior architecture, which is not only so often of a moment, but also less anchored by inertia: it's relatively easy to dispatch. So how do you build out a space for a long lease, and on the cheap?

When the advertising firm Team 1 hired Shubin + Donaldson Architects, they had a desperate need. Their offices had grown incrementally since 1989, until the staff filled three floors of disparate design and jumbled layout. The overarching look was "affluent

eighties"—everything was dark, and many things were purple. The overwhelming need was for a coherent, functional workplace that could hold its style another fifteen years.

The architects, in deference to the budget, developed a careful list of priorities to ensure the maximum transformation with the minimum of expenditure. The three top concerns were: fixing the "flow" of the floors, creating a storefront system that would visually unify the three levels and improving the workspaces. What's interesting is that most of these goals were achieved far more through relatively inexpensive re-cladding rather than re-framing.

The result is bright and clean without being spare and dull. The new main lobby was formerly blockaded by the reception desk and dim even though festooned with clip-lights in some sort of ceiling assemblage. As Shubin notes of the old design, "Sometimes people think they're doing the funky chicken, but it's not all that." Now the way is light and clear and accommodating to office-wide meetings and, just off to the left, employee lounging.

Above the reception seating a band of stained wood enclosures housing articulated flat-screen televisions. With these begins the eye-height "bar" that runs around the entire

floor, tying everything together on each individual level and providing the three with a strong visual linkage. Massive and bold in its first appearance in the lobby, it lightens and becomes more dynamic as it unfurls down the halls. Panels of wood, galvanized steel and pin board alternate with images of the firm's work.

Everywhere is light. It draws you down hallways that were previously uniformly dark, and frequently dead ended. It streams in not just from the ends, but also through the translucent walls of the offices. From there it filters deep into the cubicles, the walls of which were lowered and the panels made largely translucent or reflective. Even the relatively dark, apricot-orange walk path along the floor is extremely reflective, throwing the light far and wide.

Clutter is hard to hide in the bright California sun, so the architects did a great deal of space planning to sensibly accommodate fifteen years accumulation of stuff and staff. Copiers no longer block the halls, workstations now sit in place of redundant cross circulation and the mailroom has been centralized from three rooms into one. So serious was the client in their desire for clarity of program and ease of circulation, that the CEO's corner office was demolished to do away with the final cul-de-sac.

The project had an intense schedule and a low budget. On top of that, there was the usual choreography involved in renovating a working office. "How do you renovate half a conference room so that they can continue to have meetings in the other half?" asks project architect Michael Tadros. The key issue was how to know where to start so as to hit the mark. Says Robin Donaldson, "The architect doesn't know. The contractor doesn't know. You want to strategize every step to maximize the design and avoid having to skimp or splurge at the end."

What makes the project most interesting is the role of the "bar" in that strategy, which, in combination with the newly rational and livable workspace, creates an office interior that is both inexpensive in the short term—try \$30 a square foot—and enduring. The simple, effective workspaces can now stay put while the bar responds to fashion. The renovation allows the firm's employees to do their work unimpeded while it works to promote their image, their brand.

—JESSE BRINK



7th floor existing



7th floor renovation



*They were able to recycle about 70% of the workstations with new panels and went so far as to simply repaint the old filing cabinets. They also added lower, translucent returns that were custom fabricated to fit into the Herman Miller system.*