

## Smart Design for Shared Spaces

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A healthy work environment needs more than an ergonomically correct chair and a desk. Occupants thrive when they can move between private and shared spaces depending on their tasks.

But creating a shared space requires truly intentional design—approaching the project thoughtfully and building it to reflect the needs and wants of the people who will use it. Flexibility, a feeling of openness and ease of use are crucial.

“People naturally seek places that are welcoming and comfortable, where they can feel safe and at home,” explain Allyson Strowbridge, owner and principal of ctrl+shift+space, and Jamie Willemse, owner of Studio 7 Design. “Providing a variety of spaces that are thoughtfully planned to offer a spectrum of flexibility and choice with some unique and unexpected elements, like an art mural, can encourage their use.”

**Check out these real-life examples of shared spaces:**

### Architecture and Design Firm Cooper Carry



*(Photo: Architecture and design firm Cooper Carry. Credit: Judy Davis/Hoachlander Davis Photography)*

Architecture and design firm Cooper Carry needed to update its own offices. Originally constructed in 2006, the firm needed to accommodate a growing staff and technology needs, and wanted to create a more streamlined and flexible working space. A pool table built into a 1965 Mustang anchors a flexible, multi-purpose space where the office can gather for a variety of events.

“The pool table sparks conversations and allows us to draw clients deeper into our new space,” note Andrea Schaub and Steve Smith, principals at [Cooper Carry \(https://www.coopercarry.com/\)](https://www.coopercarry.com/). The room also features a long marble bar used for lunch, staff/office meetings, snacks and drinks.



*(Photo: Architecture and design firm Cooper Carry. Credit: Judy Davis/Hoachlander Davis Photography)*

Technology updates played a large role in the renovation of architecture and design firm Cooper Carry. A virtual reality room and materials library acknowledge new technology that has emerged since the office's original 2006 design.

Other technology upgrades include the addition of three 90-inch screens that are connected to the office servers and cable, and allow for video conferencing to other offices.

Moving an outdated filing system to an electronic-based system allowed Cooper Carry to re-envision the space and create a location where employees could interact.

## Abram Publishing Headquarters



*(Photo: Abram Publishing Headquarters. Credit: Eric Laignel courtesy Spacesmith)*

“The choices that were made reflect the corporate culture of communication and transparency that the CEO was passionate about,” says Elisabeth Post-Marner, principal at [Spacesmith \(https://www.spacesmith.com/\)](https://www.spacesmith.com/), the firm that handled the Abrams Publishing redesign. Features that focus on that transparency and openness start at the lobby, where glass office fronts are visible.

Other shared spaces include amenity spaces that open via movable walls to create room for staff town halls; and café, lunchroom and lounge areas that provide spots to work from or take a break.



*(Photo: Abram Publishing Headquarters. Credit: Eric Laignel courtesy Spacesmith)*

The library space for Abrams Publishing features bookcases with blackened steel and raw oak shelves. In keeping with the building’s historic character, an industrial-style palette of materials using the existing terra cotta ceiling and exposed flange beams was incorporated.

The booth in the lobby is the most popular part of the new space, notes Elisabeth Post-Marner, principal at Spacesmith, the firm that handled the Abrams Publishing redesign.

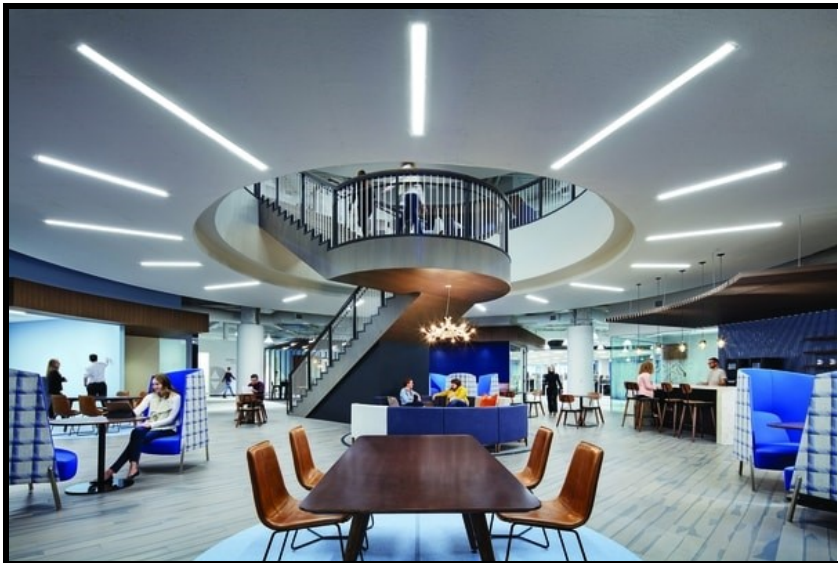
## 88 Black Falcon Pier at the Boston Seaport



(Photo: 88 Black Falcon Pier at the Boston Seaport. Credit: Darrin Hunter, courtesy [Dyer Brown \(https://dyerbrown.com/\)](https://dyerbrown.com/))

A major aspect of the reimagining of 88 Black Falcon Pier at the Boston Seaport is the focus on shared amenities that make the building a work destination. The building features areas where employees of tenant firms can go beyond work, like the [fitness room \(https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21673/title/fitness-facility-game\)](https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21673/title/fitness-facility-game) or café.

## Sleep Number Headquarters



(Photo: Sleep Number Headquarters, designed by [HGA \(https://hga.com/\)](https://hga.com/). Credit: Corey Gaffer Photography)

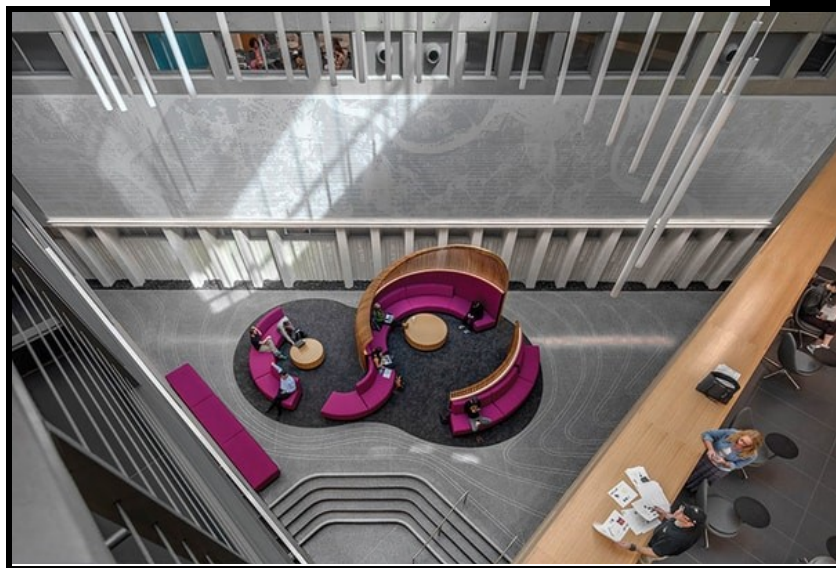
Sleep Number moved to new headquarters in downtown Minneapolis from the suburbs, bringing both corporate office and research and development facilities under one roof. To accommodate, a shift to more shared spaces was realized. A reduction in workstation size resulted in a significant increase in shared collaborative space.

This shift in space type was a conscious decision to increase communication, collaboration and the speed of decision making.

For the new Sleep Number office, planning a building that is the size of a full city block was the biggest challenge. At the center now, both metaphorically and physically, is a “plaza.”

New life was breathed into the prominent but dated building common lobby. It is now a dramatic and vibrant arrival point for the building. Here, an open stair connects employees to one another physically, while a coffee shop environment connects employees personally.

### **Northern Kentucky University’s Founders Hall**



*(Photo: Northern Kentucky University’s Founders Hall. Credit: Bill Timmerman)*

Northern Kentucky University’s newly connected Founders Hall (originally built in 1974) and the new Health Innovation Center serve as a draw for the entire campus community.

A café on the terrace level offers seating and quiet places to study, and the large atrium between the new addition and existing building serves as a focal point for the vertical circulation.

## 7 Sylvan Way



(Photo: 7 Sylvan Way in Parsippany, NJ. Credit: Michael Slack, courtesy JZA+D)

The reinvention of an atrium and installation of a café at 7 Sylvan Way in Parsippany, NJ, added value for tenant companies leasing space in the office building.

The goal was to reintroduce the lobby as a shared amenity space (<https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21674/title/trending-tenant-amenities>), transforming it into an inviting place for employees of tenant firms to use for informal meetings, relaxing, eating or working. The hospitality-inspired design makes use of the atrium's natural daylight. Furniture includes chairs and tables of various heights with USB ports integrated into them.

## 5 Tips to Create Shared Spaces People Will Use

### 1. Switch up the seating.

"Public spaces are activated when they are filled with natural daylight and offer comfortable fixed and moveable seating configurations," says James Simeo, principal of CO Architects (<https://coarchitects.com/>). "People must be able to sit and watch the action go by, as well as be seen to meet with friends and acquaintances."

Cooper Carry, an architecture firm that recently renovated its Washington, D.C., office, chose upholstered seating with tablet arms that allow designers to use laptops more easily.

### 2. Pick a central location.

People are more likely to use a shared space if they have to pass through it anyway, advise Andrea Schaub and Steve Smith, principals for Cooper Carry.

### 3. Use glass.

Glass walls (<https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21711/title/glass-envelopes>) let natural light penetrate deeper into the office, making the spaces with available daylight more inviting.

### 4. Encourage spontaneous engagement.

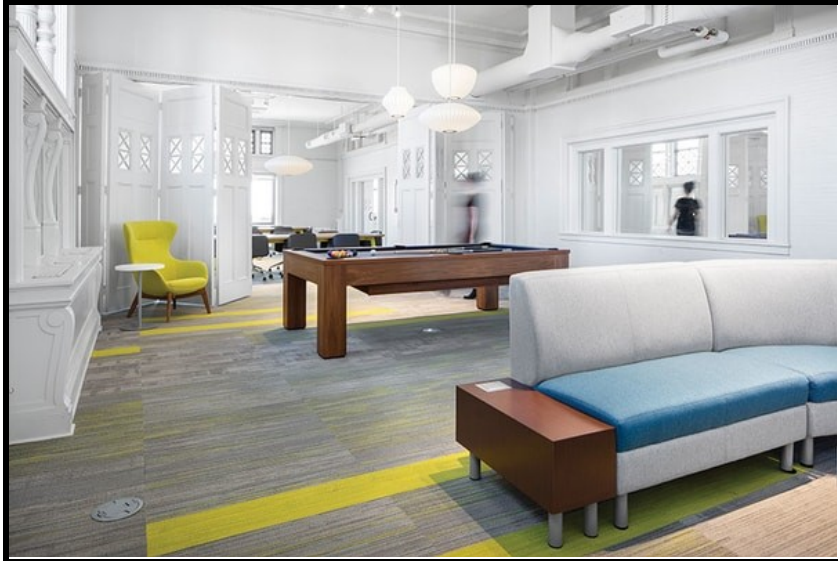
"Coffee and food service, a diversity of seating types, communal tables and integrated USB ports will offer occupants and visitors a variety of reasons to make use of the lobby amenity, an approach that creates an organically activated social environment," advises Joshua Zinder, managing partner of JZA+D.

## 5. Use acoustics to establish separate areas.

This is especially important if you have a work environment that's essentially one large space, says Ron Reim, executive vice president and co-founder of [Oculus Inc](https://oculusinc.com/). "Ceiling tiles, dropped ceilings, softer wall and surface coverings and vinyl flooring help contain and [channel the sound](https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21792/title/benefits-acoustic-flooring-healthcare-facilities)."

"The lobby atrium is a primary, highly visible shared amenity for the office building," explains Joshua Zinder, managing partner, [JZA+D](https://joshuazinder.com/). "The design has been a successful part of the building's repositioning, helping compete for Class A tenant firms—enough that the design is being used as a prototype for other properties in the Mack-Cali portfolio."

### NextCorps Facility in Rochester, NY



*(Photo: NextCorps facility in Rochester, NY. Credit: Christian Scully, courtesy TAT)*

The NextCorps facility in Rochester, NY, is an incubator space for startups and small businesses. It's purpose-built to foster interaction, encourage collaboration and provide all of the tools an entrepreneur or small high-tech business owner might need.

Supported by the University of Rochester, tenants share amenities such as gathering areas, a café lounge and game rooms, but they also come into close contact in the labs, maker spaces and other work areas.

"This is an environment where interaction and engagement can happen spontaneously," notes Kate Macaulay, project manager, [The Architectural Team, Inc](http://www.architecturalteam.com/) (TAT).

## Helios Education Foundation



(Photo: Helios Education Foundation in Tampa, FL. Credit: NanaWall Systems)

Helios Education Foundation's Tampa, FL, office was redesigned to create more flexible space in a finite footprint. The building is supported by large columns, so to maximize space around them, glass folding walls were added to create a sense of openness.

The training room, lounge and kitchen are located together in a cluster, partitioned by the glass walls, to leverage that space for an on-demand large group area.

## Union Square Ventures



(Photo: Union Square Ventures. Credit: Frank Oudeman)

Union Square Ventures, a venture capital firm focused on early stage, growth capital, late stage and startup financing, wanted to rethink how they work and interact with the technology companies in their portfolio, such as Soundcloud, Kickstarter and stripe, explains Mary Burnham, partner for Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects (<https://www.mbbarch.com/>). They needed an office to reflect that.

"Functionally, the office design emerged as an innovative "ideas incubator," Burnham says. "The overall result of MBB's design solution is a highly collaborative workspace with maximum transparency and flexibility, which nurtures start-up campaigns and collegiality, and clearly conveys USV's forward vision."

This multipurpose work and social space anchors one corner of the floor plate. The large white board is ready for brainstorming sessions and the video and teleconferencing technologies are state of the art.



A translucent [glass wall system](https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21798/title/benefits-glass-partition-walls) (<https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21798/title/benefits-glass-partition-walls>) and movable components make it easy to reconfigure the space for events of all sizes without disturbing the rest of the office.

### Sightbox, Vision Care and Contact Lens Provider



*(Photo: Sightbox, Vision Care and Contact Lens Provider. Credit: Sally Painter)*

Sightbox, a vision care and contact lens provider, was growing so rapidly that the company had to expand quickly and solve design problems on the fly, explain Allison Strowbridge, owner and principal of [ctrl+shift+space](https://www.ctrlshiftspace.com/) (<https://www.ctrlshiftspace.com/>), and Jamie Willemse, owner of [Studio 7 Design](https://studio7.design/) (<https://studio7.design/>).

“It took over adjoining spaces on either side of its existing space, which was also in serious need of an update,” Strowbridge and Willemse say. “Our goal was to integrate the expansion spaces with the original space while solving for the physical challenges of the historical building.”

This large custom art mural, which was conceived in collaboration with a local artist, “was designed as the essence of an abstract park in graffiti style,” add Strowbridge and Willemse. It creates a transition between the two sides of the adjoining suites and provides a vibrant backdrop for this collaboration space.



*(Photo: Sightbox, Vision Care and Contact Lens Provider. Credit: Sally Painter)*

A multipurpose setting with tables and chairs in varying heights is used for eating, meeting and entertaining at the Sightbox office, note Strowbridge and Willemse. Personal storage lockers provide a place to stash belongings and double as a half-wall to divide the open-plan design.

“Much of the furnishings and settings that were created in the space were intentionally included so as to provide many options for employees to choose from throughout their work day, all with the purpose of increasing productivity, comfort and a sense of well-being (<https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21800/title/biophilia-study-employee-health-wellness>),” explain Strowbridge and Willemse.



*(Photo: Sightbox, Vision Care and Contact Lens Provider. Credit: Sally Painter)*

“The design focused on developing a series of program uses resulting in a unique and playful sequence of experiences,” Strowbridge and Willemse say of the Sightbox project.

“Principles of well-being generated the application of color, texture, patterns and material, which contributed to an environment that is natural, vibrant and human-centered. Furnishings and other elements, like area rugs and throw pillows, were added to evoke a more comfortable residential feel and were placed into activity-based work settings to support the different teams and their need for access to comfortable shared collaboration spaces,” they continue.

This multipurpose space is used for gatherings, events, collaborative work and meetings. To the left is the entrance to the gym, with bike storage just beyond.

### Stantec, Global Design and Delivery Firm

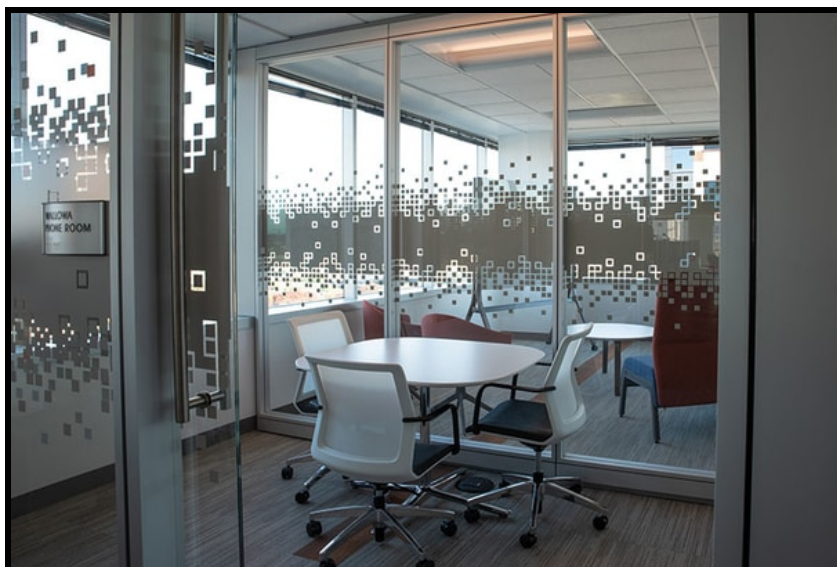


*(Photo: Stantec, Global Design and Delivery Firm. Credit: Jeffrey Wong)*

Stantec (<https://www.stantec.com/en>), a global design and delivery firm, combined two of its Portland, OR, offices into one 20,008-square-foot space on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of the Moda Tower, the 10<sup>th</sup> largest office building in the city.

Merging the two offices allows the 115-person team to better serve clients now that the whole suite of professional services are under the same roof.

The new office also features updated amenities, including two informal huddle spaces with casual seating for design discussions, client meetings and planning, and four non-traditional teaming areas that employees can use as breakout rooms, lounges and communication hubs.



*(Photo: Stantec, Global Design and Delivery Firm. Credit: Jeffrey Wong)*

“Glass-encased phone booths provide private spaces for conference and telephone calls while providing unobstructed views of the surrounding city,” explain Jacqueline Castro, principal of Stantec, and Taunya Carra, the firm’s corporate real estate project manager, of Stantec’s combined Portland, OR, office.



*(Photo: Stantec, Global Design and Delivery Firm. Credit: Jeffrey Wong)*

The four glass-walled conference rooms in Stantec’s Portland, OR, office have panoramic views of downtown, the Willamette River and the river’s Waterfront Park trail. Clients, sponsors, stakeholders and project delivery teams enjoy natural light and inspiring views.

Bench seating around the perimeter accommodates extra people.



*(Photo: Stantec, Global Design and Delivery Firm. Credit: Jeffrey Wong)*

This huddle room at Stantec’s Portland, OR, office has a laid-back atmosphere with plenty of room and comfortable seating in different heights.

### Systems Business Office for the Yale-New Haven Health System



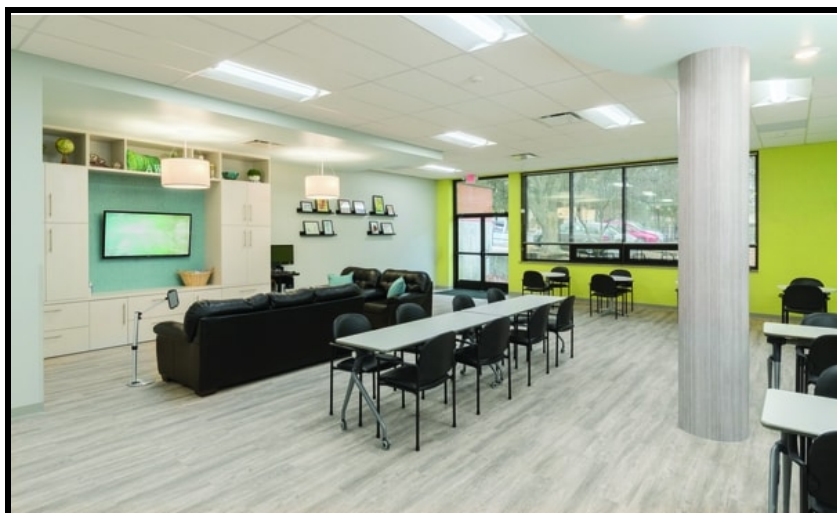
*(Photo: Systems Business Office for the Yale-New Haven Health System. Credit: Robert Umenhofer, courtesy Svigals + Partners)*

Svigals + Partners, a New Haven, CT-based architecture firm, revamped a former high school gymnasium and storage facility into the Systems Business Office for the Yale-New Haven Health System. The business service team’s previous office was dark and had tall dividers separating coworkers.

The design for the new space sought to remedy that with an “inspiring, high-performance work platform and a more appealing, inviting interior, with a careful focus on interior acoustics, comfort and open, bright workplaces,” says Lynn Brotman, associate principal of [Svigals + Partners \(https://www.svigals.com/\)](https://www.svigals.com/).

Refreshed lighting and integrated daylighting allow the colorful finishes and furnishings to pop against the neutral backdrops, creating an inviting place to work for the 280 professionals in the office.

### St. Louis Arc Office and Community Center



*(Photo: St. Louis Arc Office and Community Center. Credit: Joshua Bishop Photography)*

The St. Louis Arc Office and Community Center has 155 employees and about 75 individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities using the space regularly. Inside, a communal “campfire” and living room space (shown here) gives community members and visitors the opportunity to gather as the social hub.

Through the doors and adjacent to the core rooms, an expanded patio creates an [outdoor space](https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21963/title/buildings-activated-outdoor-spaces) (<https://www.buildings.com/news/industry-news/articleid/21963/title/buildings-activated-outdoor-spaces>) to continue the concept in nicer weather.

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Janelle Penny has more than a decade of experience in journalism, with a special emphasis on covering facilities. She aims to deliver practical, actionable content for her readers.

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