WORKSPACE

MATERIAL WORLD

In a San Diego firm with dual specialties in communication design and color/materials consultation, the workspace celebrates the best of both worlds.

Sure, every design firm’s physical environment is a living, 3D portfolio of its work. But for San Diego-based Conover, that function is even more important. That’s because principal David Conover focuses on graphic design, while his wife and partner Cecilia consults with builders and architects on color and materials. Clearly, standard issue office furniture and run-of-the-mill carpet just wouldn’t do.

The partners embarked on a redesign in November 2003, just as they signed a lease extension on the space in San Diego’s Little Italy that they’ve occupied since 1998. Not surprisingly, they started with color and materials—specifically, with the concrete floor tiles in terra cotta and warm yellow they sourced from one of Cecilia’s clients. An overall palette followed, including blonde wood desks, celadon area rugs made of the trendy hybrid material Plyflax, and mosaic metal accents.

Removal of the 2,000-square-foot space cost $32,000 and took just over a month, which sounds paintless until you consider that the seven-person team vacated the office and worked from their homes during that time. They bid out and stored everything—except the steel conference table, which was too heavy to move—so carpet could be removed and the installed.

The space boasts lots of custom-designed elements, many of which were procured from the Conovers’ clients. A call to a metal fabricator, for example, yielded scrap materials that became unique details throughout the space. “With our business,” David notes, “especially with the color consultation, we didn’t want to be the colorblind children with no shoes.”
DIVIDING THE SPACE

To visually fill the very open space (it's just over 2,000 square feet, with 12-foot-high ceilings), Conover suspended graphic panels with photographs by staffer Bruno Correia. The vinyl record represents the staff's love of music. At left, a similar arrangement is mounted vertically on the wall. Three of the firm's staff designers use workstations in the open central area.

THE REFERENCES

Cecelia Conover's work as a consultant to the building industry means her workstation is well-stocked with metal, stone and concrete samples, color palettes and other reference materials. Her specialty evolved out of the firm's early graphic-design work for builders and developers—clients that came to Conover for identity design began asking for advice on color and materials.

THE WORK

Because of Conover's dual specialty, the firm has carved out a niche in the building-materials industry with such clients as U.S. Tile. A diverse client roster also includes the University of California San Diego.

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