

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 Cecelia 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 1990. 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 Cecelia's clients. An overall palette followed, including blonde wood desktops, celadon area rugs made of the trendy hybrid material Plinyl, and rustic metal accents.

Renovation of the 2,000-square-foot space cost \$32,000 and took just over a month, which sounds painless until you consider that the seven-person team vacated the office and worked from their homes during that time. They hauled out and stored everything—except the steel conference table, which was too heavy to move—so carpet could be removed and tile 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 consultancy, we didn't want to be the cobbler's children with no shoes."



**1 THE FRONT DOOR**  
The Conovers rendered their firm's logo in metal; it's the pull on the glass door. The backplate is bronzed copper; the letters are laser-cut, powder-coated metal. This detail dates back to 1990, when the firm first moved into the space; it remains after the 2003 renovation.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BRUNO CORREIA [www.studioconover.com](http://www.studioconover.com)

**2 THE MATERIALS**  
David and Cecelia Conover, partners in both their business and personal lives, bring distinctive design disciplines to the firm: He's a graphic designer; she's a color and materials consultant. Their combined sensibilities inform the choice of materials in the office. One of Cecelia's vendors, Classic Tile and Mosaic, provided the unusual floor tiles (they're concrete, not clay); a client of David's provided metal fabrication.



David Conover



Cecelia Conover



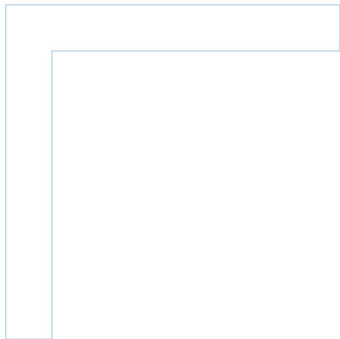
**3 THE MEETING SPACE**  
The conference table, like other metal pieces, was fabricated by Metalmedia of Phoenix, a Conover client. The base is wrapped with rusted motorcycle chain; the 5-foot-square top is nearly half-inch-thick plate steel. A "zen-like" compartment in the center holds found objects that serve as creative inspiration during meetings.

**4 THE HEAVY METALS**  
A screen separating the entryway from the workspace is a sheet of scrap steel from which gears had been stamped. The custom-made "book spine" shelving is heavy-duty, in spite of its light appearance. The Parsons desks are from the retailer Room and Board.

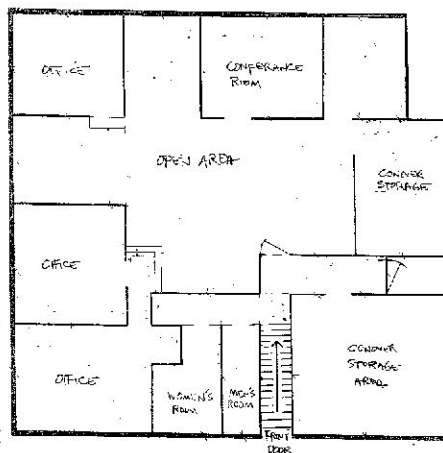


**5 THE RECEPTION AREA**  
When they renovated, the Conovers decided they didn't need a separate reception area (they don't have a receptionist); instead, they created a lounge with seating. The Metalmedia table is surrounded by Conga chairs from a furniture showroom called Mixture that's across the street from Conover's office.



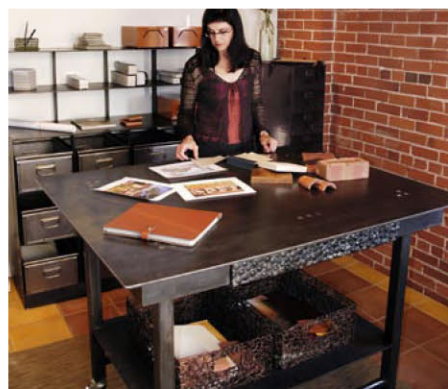


**6 DIVIDING THE SPACE**  
To visually fill the very open space (it's just over 2,000 square feet, with 12-foot high ceilings), Conover suspended graphic panels with photographs by staffer Bruno Correia. The vinyl record represents the staff's love of music. At left, a similar arrangement is mounted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



**7 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.

**8 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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**CONOVER SAN DIEGO** [www.studioconover.com](http://www.studioconover.com)

