

contract

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The Work Issue

Alcoa by SOM

UBS Warburg by The Environments Group

Alternative Office Evolution

Leadership Transition

A Park Avenue Presence

SOM returns to its 1950s Lever House to create an inviting global hub for Alcoa's senior executives

By Diana Mosher
Photography by Jon Miller

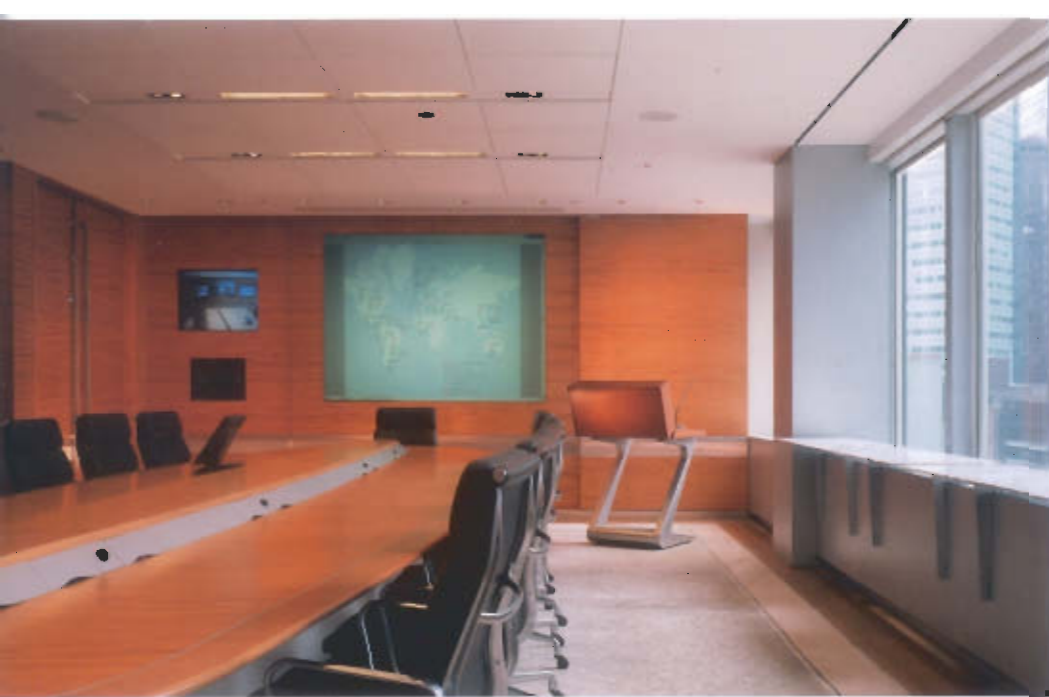


In front of the enclosed hotelling office and informal meeting room, the signature stair opens the vertical line of communication while creating a focal point on each floor (above). The glass-enclosed stair (cover) features a luminous ceiling at the top and a ring of lights on each floor.

Mike Bloomberg, New York City's businessman-turned-mayor, made headlines when he broke tradition, installing himself in a cubicle rather than City Hall's corner office. Other businessmen around the country are doing the same. At the Pittsburgh headquarters of Alcoa, an international manufacturing corporation that produces aluminum, everyone including the chairman shares an open plan environment that fosters communication and a sense of egalitarianism. This was also the desired model when Alcoa commissioned the New York office of Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM) to design a global hub in Manhattan. The progressive open plan setting and its many comfortable meeting rooms—on Park Avenue in the signature Lever House designed by SOM in the 1950s—provides a high-end setting for Alcoa's leaders to meet with members of the financial community, customers, officials, and dignitaries from the 31 countries where it operates.

Alcoa has a history of being situated in architecturally significant buildings. The landmark Lever House was selected for the company's New York offices because of its midtown location and distinction as the first curtainwall building in the city. "This choice spoke about the progressive nature of the organization, its sense of quality, and commitment to good design," says Stephen A. Apking, design partner at SOM in New York. "Alcoa's chairman is very knowledgeable about modern architecture, design, and art—and his wife is an architect. They appreciate this building and what it represents." Considering Alcoa's admiration for SOM's Lever House design, it was natural to enlist the same firm to design the company's interiors. "This was a terrific client," says Apking. "It was very easy to communicate ideas. There was no need to educate or explain."

SOM drew upon the geometric language of Lever House's exterior, emphasizing the play between solids and voids, horizontal and vertical. "We were very respectful of the building module," says Apking. "The modular lines inherent in the design of the building are also regulating and organizing the lines of the interior." Every



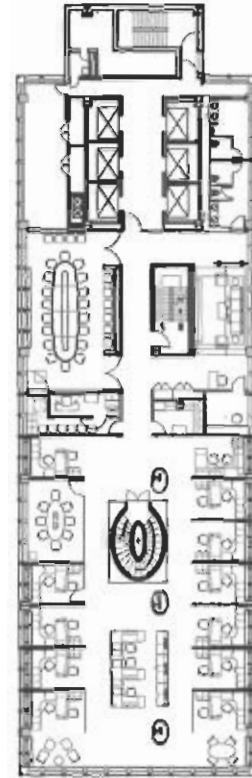
workstation is two windows wide, and all lighting and mechanical systems respond to that module. To articulate the notion of team, all five floors are treated the same in terms of layout, level of design, finishes, and universal workstations. The design team infused the space with a somewhat traditional flavor and translated Alcoa's collegial culture and work style to its sophisticated Park Avenue setting.

"Instead of systems furniture with lots of parts and pieces, we wanted a more minimal and elegant look," explains Apking. "We created a series of low wood boxes or walls that march through the working areas creating footprints." The client also wanted the offices to feel warm and relaxed. This was achieved through a neutral palette that includes honey-colored wood and wood floors. Aluminum-colored window mullions add a cool contrast along the perimeter and reinforce the connection to the building's curtainwall. Black granite on the back of the elevator lobby and white marble accent walls in the board room and reception areas provide additional contrast. The mostly indirect lighting ensures a clean, minimal aesthetic on ceilings, and the sculptural space is further enhanced by an art program that features many three-dimensional pieces. In an unusual twist for a corporate setting, the art is positioned differently on each floor.

Project Summary

While those executives who visit New York frequently are installed in permanent workstations, others are assigned a temporary spot for the duration of their stay in the city. Support and amenity areas are scattered on all five floors. An open communicating stair that ties the floors together is positioned in the center of the floorplate as a symbol of connectivity. The design team had originally envisioned an open stair and were disappointed when New York City fire codes required that it be enclosed. "But we were able to make the smoke curtain of glass and this positively enhanced the design," says Apking. The stairs became another in a series of boxes throughout the space.

Alcoa's executives are always on the go, and technological connectivity—between the New York hub, the Pittsburgh headquarters, other Alcoa facilities around the world, and the corporate jet—is integral to the organization's business strategy. Video conferencing, phone, email, and data technology has been incorporated unobtrusively at all Alcoa locations. In New York, data and power race through a 30-in. horizontal line that slices through the environment, ensuring that this global hub is connected to the global village. ☒



Like the public areas frequented by prominent visitors, Alcoa's elegant staff pantry is designed with wood, glass, and steel for an aesthetic that is as warm and comfortable as it is modern (below).



Who

Project/client: Alcoa. **Architect:** Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; Stephen Apking, design partner; T.J. Gottesdiener, administrative partner; Jane Cohen, project manager; Judy Fletcher Betts, senior designer; Corey Greer, Danyel Moseley, design team members; Harold Gross, technical coordinator; David Light, Douglass Alligood, Ron Mercado, technical team members. **Structural engineers:** Gilsanz. **MEP:** Jaros, Baum & Bolles. **General contractor:** StructureTone. **Lighting designer:** Fisher Marantz Stone. **AV:** Costello Maione Schuch. **Acoustics:** Acoustic Dimensions. **Graphics, signage:** Pentagram. **Furniture dealer:** EvensonBest. **Art:** Art Advisory Services. **Photographer:** Jon Miller © Hedrich Blessing.

What

Paint: Benjamin Moore, Scuffmaster. **Laminate:** Nevamar. **Flooring:** American Wood Floors. **Carpet/carpet tile:** Edward Fields, V'soske, Chilewich. **Carpet backing:** Treadmore Pad. **Ceiling:** Armstrong. **Lighting:** RSA, Modular Int'l, Kurt Versen, Halo, Belfer, Edison Price. **Door hardware:** Elmes & Sargent. **Glass:** Galaxy Glass & Stone™. **Window treatments:** Sol-R-Veil. **Wood flooring:** American Wood Floors, William Sommerville. **Workstations:** Halcon, Gemini (custom). **Workstation seating:** Humanscale. **Lounge seating:** B&B Italia. **Staff pantry:** M2L. **Other seating:** Herman Miller. **Staff pantry tables:** Custom Interior Décor. **Files:** Halcon. **Conference table, architectural woodworking:** William Sommerville. **Planters, accessories:** Knoll. **Signage:** Pentagram. **Plumbing fittings:** Dornbracht.

Where

Location: New York, N.Y. **Total floor area:** 60,718 sq. ft. **No. of floors:** 7. **Average floor size:** 8,674 sq. ft. **Capacity:** 148.