

# INTERIOR DESIGN

MARCH 2001



we sell  
get fire



**OFFICE POLITICS**

*Re-engineering the Corporate Ladder*

# Tunnel Vision

Shubin and Donaldson makes a case for open architecture in a Culver City warehouse for Ogilvy & Mather.

**YOU ARE WHERE YOU WORK.** At least that seems to be the current thinking among media types. Ad agencies, which are increasingly expanding beyond broadcast and print to the Internet, are among those forging the status of Madison Avenue-type offices in favor of warehouse life. Ogilvy & Mather, founded in 1948 as a one-man firm by David Ogilvy and now part of WPP Worldwide, has joined the burgeoning trend of rejecting more traditional quarters in favor of open-plan designs. For agency personnel, the move signaled "a shift from exclusion to inclusion," says Joe McDonagh, O&M's co-vice-president and creative director, who is also responsible for initiating the change. "It's not about a new place to work, but a new way to work," he told staff members during preliminary meetings. "You won't be able to retreat to an office." Following interviews with many of Los Angeles's high-profile design firms, McDonagh opted for Shubin and Donaldson, because, he explains, "I wished they worked for my company." →

*Right: A 44-ft.-long tube of perforated metal panels creates an alluring entry progression while shielding the work environment from the street.*

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOM BONNER





*Above and opposite: "We had to do something to stand up to the glass facade, something that didn't mumble," say the architects of their entry tunnel. Inside, monitors show computer-driven reels developed for clients or the agency itself. A portrait of company founder David Ogilvy looms at the tunnel's opening.*

McDonagh made good on his promise for a stimulating workplace, starting with the location. The 30,000-sq.-ft. building is part of the renewal of Culver City initiated by Frederick and Laurie Smith of Samitarian Constructs and architect Eric Owen Moss's highly visible Stealth building. O&M's site has the added draw of a surrounding creative community that includes AOL and various production companies and web-design shops.

Russell Shubin and Robin Donaldson were inspired by the challenge to reinvent O&M's offices. The agency's former quarters, on several floors in a west Los Angeles office tower on Wilshire Boulevard, was traditional to say the least. "It could have been a law office," the architects comment. "There was no physical identity as a company. You could go for a week without seeing someone else." But at O&M's new space, all 135 employees, including McDonagh and his partner Angus Fraser, participate in the open architectural scheme. "Everyone, from executive management to support services, knows the pulse of the company," McDonagh remarks. "This way, you get a report card every day. You're either part of the process or you're not."

The architects, who maintain offices in Culver City and Santa Barbara, confronted a raw interior space, devoid of services and utilities but defined by some unalterable givens. There was a 24-ft.-high, double-bow truss ceiling of exposed timber. Eric Owen Moss designed the entire exterior shell, which includes a striking, plate-glass entry facade. He also provided a 6,000-sq.-ft. sunken meeting area in the rear, ideal for large presentations and parties, as well as massive sliding steel doors that lead to the nearby Stealth building. Shubin and Donaldson assumed complete responsibility for the front portion of the building, where the workforce would be concentrated, collaborating with Moss on the rear sector, which was designed for client interaction.

Shubin and Donaldson eschewed arbitrary forms of organization and artificial analogies to city planning. "We don't have to call an area Central Park to make it welcoming," they say, referring to the creation of distinct areas for work, play, and employee gatherings. They opted for a looser scheme suggesting a more ad-hoc approach to circulation.

After conducting extensive preliminary surveys with O&M staff, the architects concluded that adjacencies would not be account-related but loosely based on departmental organization. They also ascertained certain necessities: an audio/visual →





library, listening rooms, a full-scale production center with Avid editing bays, a computer studio for print layouts, a kitchen, and several meeting, brand, and focus rooms. In keeping with the designer's organic scheme, McDonagh and Fraser would be located deal center with only a small meeting enclosure separating their stations. Accessibility rather than status is the message.

Moss's striking glass façade, incorporating primary and secondary entrance portals flanking a run of canted glass, presented its own problems. "How do you modulate between the glass and people sitting at their work stations without putting up a wall?" the architects wondered. Their solution, a 44-ft.-long tube of perforated metal panels, is pragmatic, providing an enticing entry sequence and, equipped with a pair of monitors, a vehicle for O&M to show continuous, computer-driven loops about the company itself and/or campaigns for a particular client. One of David Ogilvy's credos is printed nearby in billboard style: "We sell or else. We sell or we get fired." The tube reads as a time tunnel, alluding to O&M's august history as well as to its future.

This intriguing entry leads to the heart of the office. Work stations are nearly identical, but differ slightly in configuration. These custom units, developed with Sitag's dTank design department, consist of perforated metal dividers, wood laminate work surfaces, steel shelves, →

*Left: A 6,000-sq.-ft. rear sector, developed with Eric Owen Moss, accommodates brand and focus rooms as well as a 2,400-sq.-ft. center pit. The area's location assures that O&M's clients will experience the entire workplace en route to rooms dedicated for their use.*

*Above: A meeting room separates the co-presidents' work stations.*

adjustable-height tables, and monitor stands. Each encompasses about 39 sq. ft. with seven linear feet of counter surface. Those at the perimeter are slightly larger and can be partially enclosed with sliding panels of the same perforated metal.

The custom work stations lend a solid quality to the space, as do drywall enclosures defining the production zone, studio, and listening rooms. But the architects required an additional layer of articulation in order to avoid "a mousy space with just a bunch of work stations." To that end, they installed five screen walls, made from unistrut frames and acrylic panels with Scotch-print graphics. A similar zoning device defines the library, where the unistrut system supports

four-ft. squares of clear acrylic. Finally, shifting floor treatments help differentiate the space. Rather than an expanse of uninterrupted concrete, the floor is partially carpeted "to make it seem more finished and moderate the shock," the designers explain. Work stations, Avid bays, and brand and focus rooms are carpeted. Circulation, library, and studio areas are concrete.

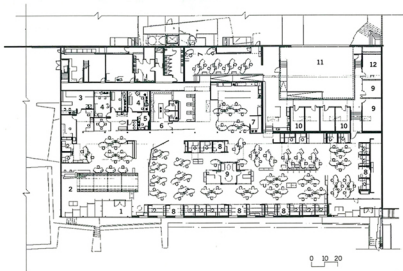
As for new business, it's too soon to tell if the design solution succeeds as an ad for O&M itself. At the time of writing, the agency had occupied the site for only five months. But Shubin and Donaldson believe it works for the staff. "Many people feel bolder in this space," the architects assert.

The project was completed in ten months for about \$65 per sq. ft. Principals share credit with project architect/manager Sean Hagan, project architect Josh Blumer, and the project team of Fred Bescancon, Mahyar Abousaedi, Mark Gee, Mark Herschman, Mina Javid, Brennan Lindner, and Rob Sutman.

—Eddie Cohen



- 1 ENTRY
- 2 RECEPTION
- 3 LIBRARY
- 4 VIDEO EDIT BAY
- 5 RECORDING STUDIO
- 6 VIDEO LIBRARY
- 7 POST PRODUCTION
- 8 WORK ROOM
- 9 CONFERENCE
- 10 BRAND ROOM
- 11 GATHERING SPACE
- 12 FOCUS ROOM



*Opposite: One of the screen walls functions like a billboard, with David Ogilby's image overlooking the space. This connection of the firm's past to its present and future was important to the architects. Drywall enclosures were used in lieu of exposed ducts for mechanicals.*

*Above: Transparent acrylic panels and a unistrut framework articulate the audio/visual library. Red-painted drywall encloses listening rooms. CUSTOM TUBE, WEISS SHEET METAL, WORK STATIONS, BRAND ROOM TABLES AND CHAIRS, RED BENCHES, STAG, CHAIRS, HERMAN MILLER, CARPET, MASLAND, SUPERGRAPHS, MAGIC LIGHTING, CANLET, STONCO, PRUDENTIAL, PRESOLITE, GOTHAM, BRUCK, LITHONIA, ALKCO. LIGHTING CONSULTANT LIGHTING DESIGN ALLIANCE, MECHANICAL ENGINEER FRUCHTMAN & ASSOC. ELECTRICAL, PAUL IMMERMANN, CONTRACTOR SIERRA PACIFIC CONSTRUCTORS.*