

# INTERIOR GLASS: Maximizing The Use of Glass In Your Office Design



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The open office has embraced the use of glass enclosed spaces for privacy. Even traditional offices have opted for this option in the conference room and in training spaces.

Transparency in the communication of business ideals and messaging comes into the physical space as a strong design element with the use of glass walled areas. Glass is being used to reduce space but still provide a feeling of openness.

The flexibility of de-mountable glass in a space is a huge contender with rental spaces and open plan spaces alike. With the trend toward industrial design, surfaces play a large role in the aesthetic and the functionality.

When working with glass in your design, there are some things to consider:

## **Acoustics**

Acoustical and privacy concerns come into play when offices include an abundance of interior glass. A perceptible echo over the phone might have been the result of a glass-enclosed room not being sufficiently outfitted with noise-absorbing materials, such as wall fabric, carpet tile, or area rugs.

Pay more attention to the surfaces in your environment, especially when the office design is "industrial" style where there are often a lot of hard surfaces to contend with and fewer

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accessories. Sound-masking technology can help with speech privacy and acoustics. Specifying a minimum half-inch glass and sealing the joints to increase an office's acoustical privacy will also help sound reverberation.

## Privacy

Workplace privacy is definitely evolving. And the expanding use of interior glass is part of the move by companies to open up their workspaces and encourage collaboration.

*Translucent glass is available in a variety of prints, patterns, and colors. And some companies are using this glass for branding purposes.*



But most companies still need areas for “confidential sanctuaries” that offer greater privacy. Glass partitions and doors make some employees nervous because they feel exposed and under the constant scrutiny of peers and supervisors.

Obvious solutions often begin with applying film or graphics over the glass. It's best advised to live with your spaces for a few months before making privacy-related changes, which ultimately might only mean altering your space plan.

There is a new product on the market creating some intrigue. It's called “cloaking” film, by Designtex, that in essence, jumbles content: a person looking into a glass-enclosed room covered with cloaking film can see people but not information, such as numbers on computer screens or a projected slideshow presentation.

Costlier options include opaque laminated glass and so-called “switchable” glass, which electronically darkens the panes. Switchable glass will provide conference rooms with a high-tech ‘wow’ factor and privacy on demand, but it's not a clear surface.

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## Light

Glare doesn't seem to be a major issue when installing interior glass. But buildings with only perimeter windows or limited exterior views, may want to account for natural light coming into the space, as well as the office's overall lighting design.

All lighting sources need to work in tandem. Using artificial light to minimize the low and high light contrasts caused by daylight streaming into an office. The use of perforated roller blinds on exterior windows and automated interior lighting controls can assist in leveling the lighting.

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In some cases, glare must be addressed more directly. Buildings whose south and west sides were exposed to significant sunlight during afternoon hours will require some savvy space planning to control how light affects them:

- Eliminating all conference rooms along the perimeter of the building
- Installing a shading system on the perimeter windows
- Applying four-foot-high film strips on the glass for interior rooms to cool "hot spots"
- Moving the interior lighting in the ceiling 12 inches farther away from the interior glass walls

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## Aesthetic

Frameless glass for conference and meeting rooms provides a clean modern look and eliminates the need for opaque pieces to create a seamless wall. Virtually every manufacturer has an office-front system that includes frameless glass.

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But frameless glass does have some limitations. Any interior office structure that includes an opening of four to six feet has to be framed. Framed systems also provide much better acoustical privacy and are easier to install than frameless if floors and ceilings are uneven.

Frameless glass can also pose safety and liability problems because people may walk into frameless walls and doors, if installed in high traffic areas. The frameless vs framed debate often comes down to what statement a company wants to make with their design, and how much they are willing to spend.

The design potential is endless, timber trim framing around glass walls and doors can complement the office's wood floors, walls, and ceilings. Floor-to-ceiling frameless glass partitions and sliding doors can be capped the top and bottom of the glass with steel framing.

Creating a statement with glass is a design trend that is likely to be around awhile. The versatility of this kind of surface is as limitless as your imagination, so find the best way to use it to the advantage of your brand and your design.

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