



Gensler San Diego, California



When you're a design firm as well known as Gensler, your office needs to clearly express who you are and what you do. Especially if it's a place where you bring potential clients. But what happens when your workplace isn't working as hard as it should be to tell your brand story? What if it's not doing everything it can to help people connect, solve problems, and explore their creativity? What if it's not helping you establish a strong presence in your community? These are the problems the team at Gensler needed to solve when they redesigned their Herman Miller-furnished office in San Diego.

A penthouse office with views of San Diego Bay can be impressive to clients. But not if that means the people who work there have difficulty working together on creative projects. For more than a decade, Gensler's employees were dispersed across the top floors of an office tower in downtown San Diego. "The challenge with being up there was that we were very disconnected from each other," says Scott Peterson, a principal at Gensler. "People would come into work, and we wouldn't see them at all for days on end."

When the first and second floors of the office tower became available for lease, the Gensler team welcomed the opportunity to relocate. It was a chance to make workplace changes that would better suit the highly interactive way the team wanted to work, broadcast the firm's dedication to creating transformative designs for their clients, and strengthen their ties to the local community.

Case Study

As the team searched for partners for the redesign, they wanted a collaborator that shared their passion for human-centered design and a core belief that good design can improve lives. “Herman Miller’s ideas on work and the workplace made it easy for us to work together,” says Peterson.

Mock It Up

The Gensler team wanted the new space to encourage creativity and problem solving—especially the kind that happens when people spontaneously bump into one another as they move about the office. To explore possibilities for what casual group settings could look like in Gensler’s workplace, the design team created mock-ups that tailored Herman Miller’s furnishings to the firm’s distinctively bold aesthetic.

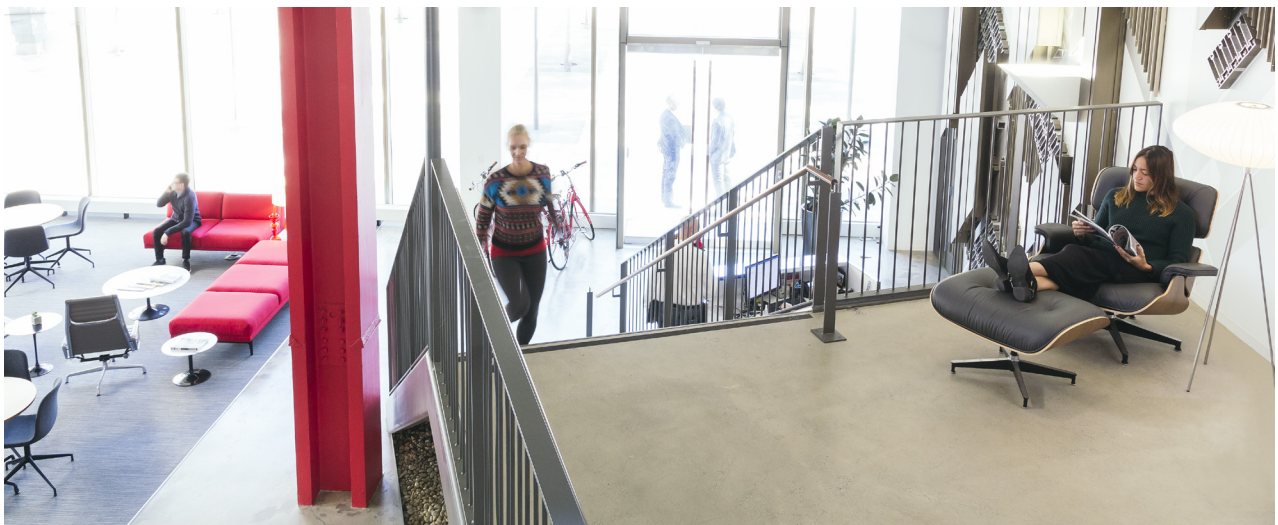
Beyond decorative decisions, getting hands-on with Herman Miller helped Gensler see how different types of furniture elements could enhance people’s comfort and performance in various settings across the office. It gave the Gensler team confidence that new additions, like sit-to-stand desks, would meet people’s cognitive and physical needs while also standing up to the demands of daily use in a fast-paced design firm.

Gensler also viewed Herman Miller as a valuable partner that could contribute to its sustainability initiatives. The team wanted to achieve LEED Platinum and WELL Gold certifications and knew that furniture plays an important role in that process. Herman Miller’s robust portfolio of sustainable options—along with the research and certifications to back them up—helped Gensler achieve their sustainability goals and further express their values through the workplace.

Bring the Outside In

The new office serves as a compelling billboard for Gensler’s design capabilities, as well as their cultural connection to the San Diego community. Floor-to-ceiling windows put people working in the office at street view. This gives employees a vista to the sunny, vibrant world outside and offers passersby a view of the type of design work Gensler does.

“Being on the ground floor, we’re more visible to people on the street,” said Michelle Gallegos, a Design Tech at Gensler. “It’s an opportunity for the community to stop by, ask us questions, and engage with who we are, what do we do, and what our purpose is.”



This stunning mezzanine, featuring an Eames Lounge Chair and Ottoman, gives all who pass through a view to bustling city outside. Settings such as this help strengthen Gensler’s ties with the community.

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A bright, airy lobby just off the main entrance is the perfect place for the team to welcome new clients. Floor-to-ceiling windows connect the space to the vibrant streetscape. Personal touches like the Gensler surfboard help bring the San Diego office's unique personality to life.

When clients and other visitors enter the space, they are greeted by a bright, airy lobby anchored by a sizeable staircase to the second floor. Compelling design elements—an oversized Gensler G, design works-in-progress flanking the walls, a digital display showcasing completed products—reinforce their brand and tell a story about Gensler's impressive design portfolio. Vignettes of comfy lounge seating and long rows of tables with stools invite people to sit and socialize.



Sit-to-stand desks give people the option to adjust the height of their workstations based on the task at hand and allow them to stay more active throughout the day.

The lobby—along with a conference room just off the main space—is a place where the Gensler team is proud to host clients. They are so proud of the space, in fact, that they often invite members of the community to use it for fundraisers and holiday events.

In another part of the lobby, you'll frequently find colleagues working together or chatting in a cozy living room space, surrounded by staff photos and Gensler memorabilia. A spacious, centralized café invites people to catch up over a cup of coffee, while an outdoor veranda allows people to enjoy each other's company and the warm San Diego sun.

Find Your Focus

To give the Gensler team the necessary space to focus on individual tasks—and to do so comfortably—Herman Miller outfitted their work areas with sit-to-stand desks. These keep people moving during the day as they easily transition between postures and tasks.

"As a designer, the ability to lift your desk up and have a high-top table right there at your fingertips is a game changer," says Gallegos. "When someone comes over, you can sketch out ideas and comfortably look at them together."

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Standing-height tables with stools also promote movement and make it easier for people to touch down and work for a few hours or put their heads together with colleagues to review plans. These flexible public workspaces are supplemented by a series of quiet, enclosed rooms that people can occupy for work sessions or private phone calls.

With access to a variety of new settings, people seem happier when they come to work each day. "It's like a breath of fresh air," says administrator Ashley Carman. "It was an absolute relief to not be so concerned about where certain meetings were going to be or if there was room to work or collaborate."

Live Your Values

The new office has been an incredibly effective way for Gensler to share their philosophy of design with their clients. Says Gallegos, "Clients can come here, use the space, see what we are professing to them firsthand, say, 'I understand what it is that you are trying to do for us, and I accept it. I see why this is so important. I like this environment. I see the connectivity, the socialization, the collaboration. I see the sit-stand desks and how they are facilitating a healthy lifestyle.'"



(Top) An outdoor veranda off the second floor is a favorite spot for socializing while enjoying the fine San Diego weather. (Bottom Right) A comfortably appointed living room invites casual conversations. (Bottom Left) High-top tables encourage impromptu chats and quick huddles to review work.

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The kitchen is now a favorite space for many of Gensler's designers and architects. The bright, open environment promotes impromptu collaborations throughout the day.

In the end, Herman Miller helped Gensler accomplish all their goals. "When you factor in everything—the research, the quality of the product, the history of the organization, how we both view the work environment—it just all added up to the perfect storm of what we needed for our office," says Peterson.

The result is a workplace that brings Gensler's values to life and elevates the way that people interact both with each other and their community.

Case Study

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