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Office space

Unique and inspiring spaces make offices more workable and worker-friendly.

ANNE BROCKMAN



A tree with yellow glass leaves welcomes visitors to real estate auction company Williams & Williams' headquarters. Across town at Up With Trees, a tree mosaic and large painted tree adorn the walls.

Two different companies but with similar decorating missions. Both have embraced the power of the three Rs — reduce, reuse, recycle — to create office spaces that have dramatically improved their working environments.

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For Williams & Williams, inspiration came with a recent move to a 45,000-square-foot office space, which allowed the company to consolidate multiple offices and grow as a group.

“What’s so special about this space for us is that, being an auction company, our whole goal is to reuse, recycle, repurpose real estate,” says **Amy Bates**, senior vice president for marketing. “We decided, why don’t we do the same thing, follow that same philosophy, and have our employees design our headquarters for employees?”

Enter Creative Design Manager **Anya Hoffecker**, who worked with Bates and a team of three other employees to plan the move of 150 employees, all while creating an energizing, workable environment.



At Williams & Williams employees, fresh flowers are brought in regularly and placed throughout the space.

The team reorganized and repurposed existing furniture and cubicles, only purchasing new accent pieces and accessories. They added small conversation areas, perfect for a quick meeting but still intimate, thanks to panels made of tree branches.

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While these additions may seem like simple aesthetics, Williams & Williams officials say that the company, which has grown from 20 people six years ago to 150 full-time employees today, can now better collaborate thanks to the improved space.

“I think from where I sit and what I see is there’s a pride, a pride that I didn’t see,” Bates says.

Hoffecker says employees feel a sense of ownership, reflecting not only their company’s beliefs but also their own.

“This is our space that was built for us, by us, for us to live and work in, and it’s not just a building anymore,” Hoffecker says.

Simple gestures reflect this, such as co-workers decorating and adding their own plants to office spaces and creating a knowledge center in the break room full of books and DVDs employees can swap.

The design is also pleasing for visitors and guests. Now visitors follow a cohesive curve from the reception area past the coffee bar to the executive conference rooms.

Making space for visitors and guests, as well as providing a better work environment for employees and volunteers, were high priorities for Up With Trees when it set out to move from a warehouse office space to an updated and renovated 1920s building downtown.

The organization, whose mission is planting, preserving and promoting Tulsa’s urban forest, had limited space in its previous office and warehouse and a limited moving budget, Executive Director **Anna America** says.

So America repurposed existing furniture and bought quality used pieces at a local auction — a way to recycle and save money.

The increased space now allows Up With Trees to host different programs, such as its Citizen Forester classes, and hold board meetings and social functions. The office will even be the site of an upcoming Tulsa Community College horticulture class.



A mosaic honoring the organization’s sponsors and donors greets visitors upon arrival at Up With Trees’ headquarters.

Up With Trees’ office revolves around a large open space with modular tables and a large painted tree on a wall that serves two roles: an artistic element and a projector screen. America says the idea came from one of the organization’s construction volunteers, Matrix Architects.

“The space is just infinitely better than it would have been if we had tried to figure out those things on our own,” or even hired out the work, she says. The nonprofit’s board of directors and volunteers donated much of the construction and remodeling.

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To improve the building's energy consumption, all offices contain automatic light sensors, and additional insulation and low-energy lights were installed.

The new space provides ample parking, multiple bathrooms, handicapped accessibility and increased office, warehouse and shop space.

An upscale downtown office with glass-framed offices and walls inspired America. She purchased inexpensive French doors, which her contractors then stained and framed to create office walls.

That touch, along with the warm colors and general aesthetics, makes this an office that America and her employees enjoy.

"Everybody really, really loves what we do; they care about it, they believe in it, but they're able to come someplace where they like being," America says. "The space is, I think, functionally and emotionally and psychologically good for us. I think it makes just a huge difference."

Outfitting an office

Cari Marshall, executive vice president and COO of L&M Office Furniture, knows her way around an office.

Whether it's setting up a home office or redecorating a whole floor, Marshall can help anyone create a productive environment, but she insists that some aspects of offices are priorities. Step one: selecting a chair.

"That is the comfort feature in the office," Marshall says. "That's the place that will do the most for maintaining their correct posture and a good working position."

Besides finding the right chair, planning is key.

"That saves all the trouble later on," Marshall says. "It's extremely important. We spend a lot more time on that than we do actually deciding what vendor fits this project."

Manufacturers are redesigning furniture to meet today's office needs, she says.

Manufacturers "are adapting because technology has changed," Marshall says. "Work surfaces are getting smaller. We don't need the big corners (of desks) anymore because the big computer monitors are kind of going away."

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“There is a lot more attention to ergonomics (and they’ve) given you more options on places to put things and adjustments on the things so that, especially in a shared workspace ... where different people are coming into the same chair and the same office, that chair can make the adjustments, the keyboard will make the adjustments and the monitor can move so it will cover all the ranges of sizes of people.” Because of its age, the building has touches one doesn’t find in most high-rises. The original terrazzo floors were rejuvenated and the exposed brick walls were incorporated into the design.