

Reflect Your Style: Law Offices Redesigned

By Lois Goodell

The newest generations of workers are not content to work inside the four walls of a conventional office that is void of personality. They want to see the fresh outlook that they bring to their work reflected in their workplaces. Fortunately for young professionals, office personalization is gaining traction due in large part to an increasingly younger workforce and more companies leveraging interior design to demonstrate a particular brand and value set to their clients.

Law firms, in particular, have come a long way. Traditional corner offices, elegant dining rooms, and dark wood paneling and brass fixtures are no longer representative of some modern firms. Culture and technology have engendered major changes in law firms' interior design. Attorney offices have been reduced in size but are more efficiently designed with ergonomic furnishings and more layout space to support collaborative work. Large sub-dividable multi-purpose rooms provide an onsite conferencing center, while fully-wired, mixed-use casual meeting spaces take pressure off formal conference rooms. A new focus on "identity" to distinguish a firm is resulting in the addition of trendy cafés and ultra-contemporary reception areas.

Concurrently, social networks have influenced the next generation of workers, who are accustomed to open and collaborative communication. This trend is paralleled in the legal workplace, where there has been a shift from a partner-client relationship toward a more team-oriented client service approach. For example, the majority of client meetings are now being held in the public zone of conference rooms near the reception area. As firms' public spaces move toward being more dynamic, your personal workspace should follow.

While every firm's brand is different, there are some universal and cost-effective solutions to add your own personal touch to your office. These easy-to-implement design tips will improve morale and productivity.

Use color. Color impacts mood and can be a powerful tool in defining your own personal brand and style. Use it to your advantage and enhance your workspace with pops of color in your personal accessories. All shades of green are popular right now, perhaps due to the association with sustainability and the environment.

Choose your artwork carefully. Posters are fine for college dorms, but if you really want to take your office to the next level begin collecting original paintings and sculptures. There are pieces that work for every budget. Even something as simple as a framed children's drawing lends a professional air to a whimsical sketch. A framed map from a recent trip connotes a world traveler. Each piece provides a glimpse into the person behind the desk.

Add a personal touch. A tack panel can be a great way to display your favorite cartoon strips or photos of friends. It's compact, organized, and very portable. If you have to move offices at some point in the future, it's easy to carry down the hall.

Add layers and interest. A small area rug can add color and pattern to your office, which can enliven a space and create an inviting environment. Or, designate a particular shelf or bookcase for mementos: a pint-size MINI Cooper®, a

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graphic postcard, and professional recognitions can make quite an interesting collection.

Take initiative. Be active in forming or joining a committee that considers the design of office space. Together, the group can balance the needs of the law firm (e.g., maintenance, flexibility) with the desire for employees to express themselves. It also could provide you with a voice when the firm is making big design decisions, such as overall office renovations.

There are some “don’ts.” For example, fake flowers are always a “no.” In this vein, plants can be a nice touch, but if you can’t take care of them they’re better off with the firm’s green thumb.

Just remember that a simple approach often works best. Too much clutter in your office space may make it difficult to concentrate on your first priority—your clients and your career. Your office space should reflect a balance of personal professionalism.

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