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BY JENNIFER LASH

Designers in Their Workplace

While offices vary from company to company, something the six lighting design firms highlighted in this photo essay have in common is the desire for their design studios to foster communication and encourage collaboration. While one firm is housed in a row house painted purple on Manhattan's Upper West Side and another features exposed ceilings and open work areas with no partitions, all six of the offices profiled here seem to recognize the importance of communication when it comes to creating dynamic lighting designs. These spaces—some old, some new, some recently revamped—are all designed as open environments to bring out employees' creativity while making it easier to run ideas by colleagues and show designs and new products to clients. What follows is a peek into each of these six lighting design offices, with insight from firm principals and associates who discuss not only the inspiration behind the design of the space, but also how the space inspires them as they work to create their lighting designs.



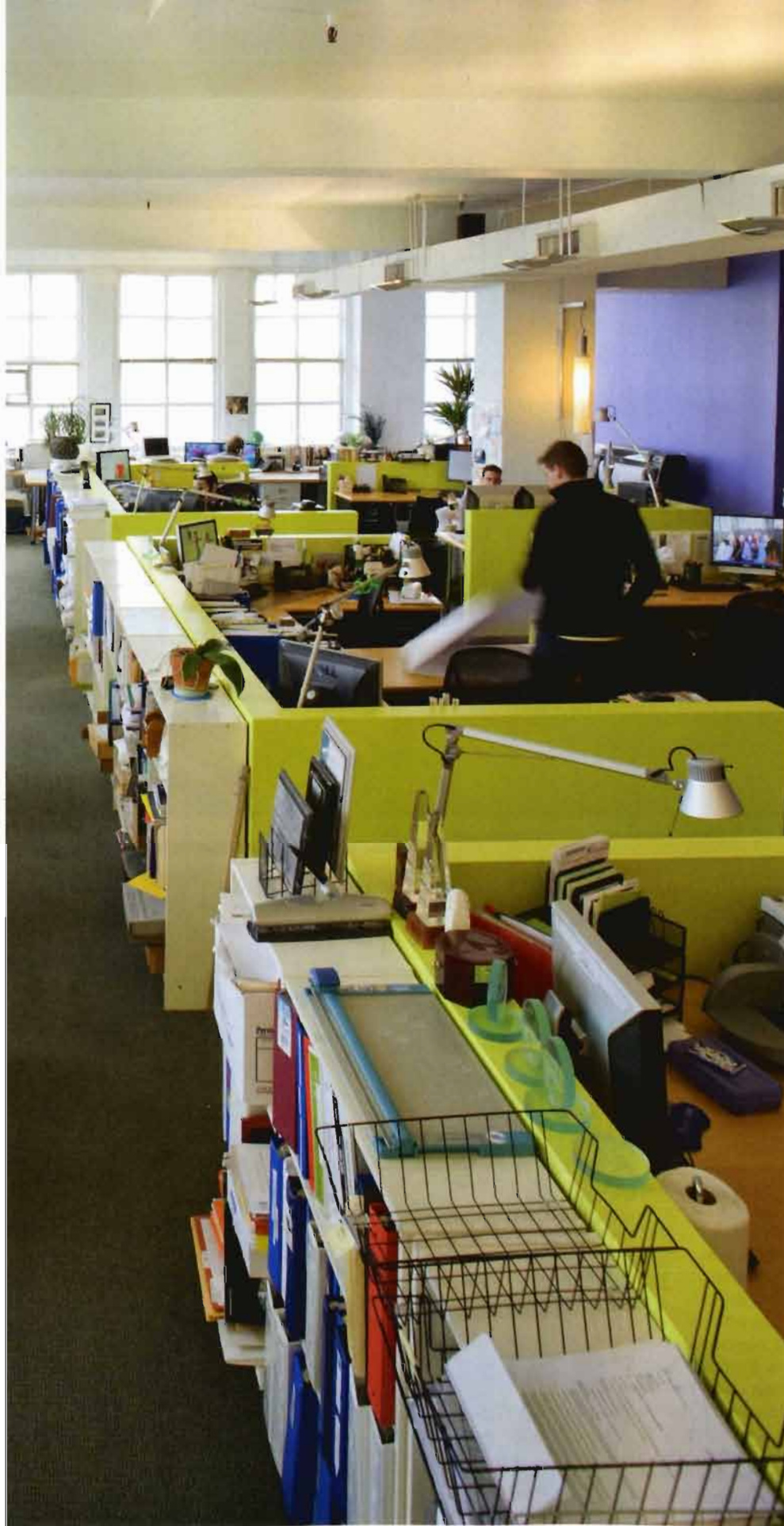
HOK St. Louis www.hok.com

As one of numerous offices worldwide, HOK has been in the same building in downtown St. Louis for 15 years. A consolidation of space about three years ago brought divisions housed on different floors of the building together all on one. Currently, the space is about 56,000 square feet and very open, with impromptu meeting spaces throughout such as a common coffee bar and banquette seating. There are no cubicles in the studio space, but rather, square areas without partitions where designers work. Partitions discourage communication and collaboration, says associate David Ziolkowski, and as a result there is not much privacy in the office. Lighting designer Kathleen Lauth explains that to her, the office serves as a case study, helping to see what works and what could work better. "It also is helpful to walk around to show lighting fixtures or techniques to others," she adds. Ziolkowski says having clients in the office is great because the space allows the designers to show them different lighting solutions. Overall, the St. Louis office "is raw, unforgiving, and totally original," Ziolkowski says. "Watching people's faces when they walk in for the first time is thoroughly entertaining." While not a traditional corporate environment, the unique open setup with no partitions and exposed ceilings encourages creativity and communication among HOK staff.

HOK's nontraditional office space in St. Louis (above, left) features exposed ceilings and close working quarters without cubicles or partitions because those discourage communication among staff members. Impromptu meeting spaces (above, right) allow employees to collaborate on projects and are located throughout the office.



HOK PHOTOS: STEFAN HESTER; HORTON LEES BROGDEN PHOTOS: MATT GREENSLADE



Horton Lees Brogden Lighting Design

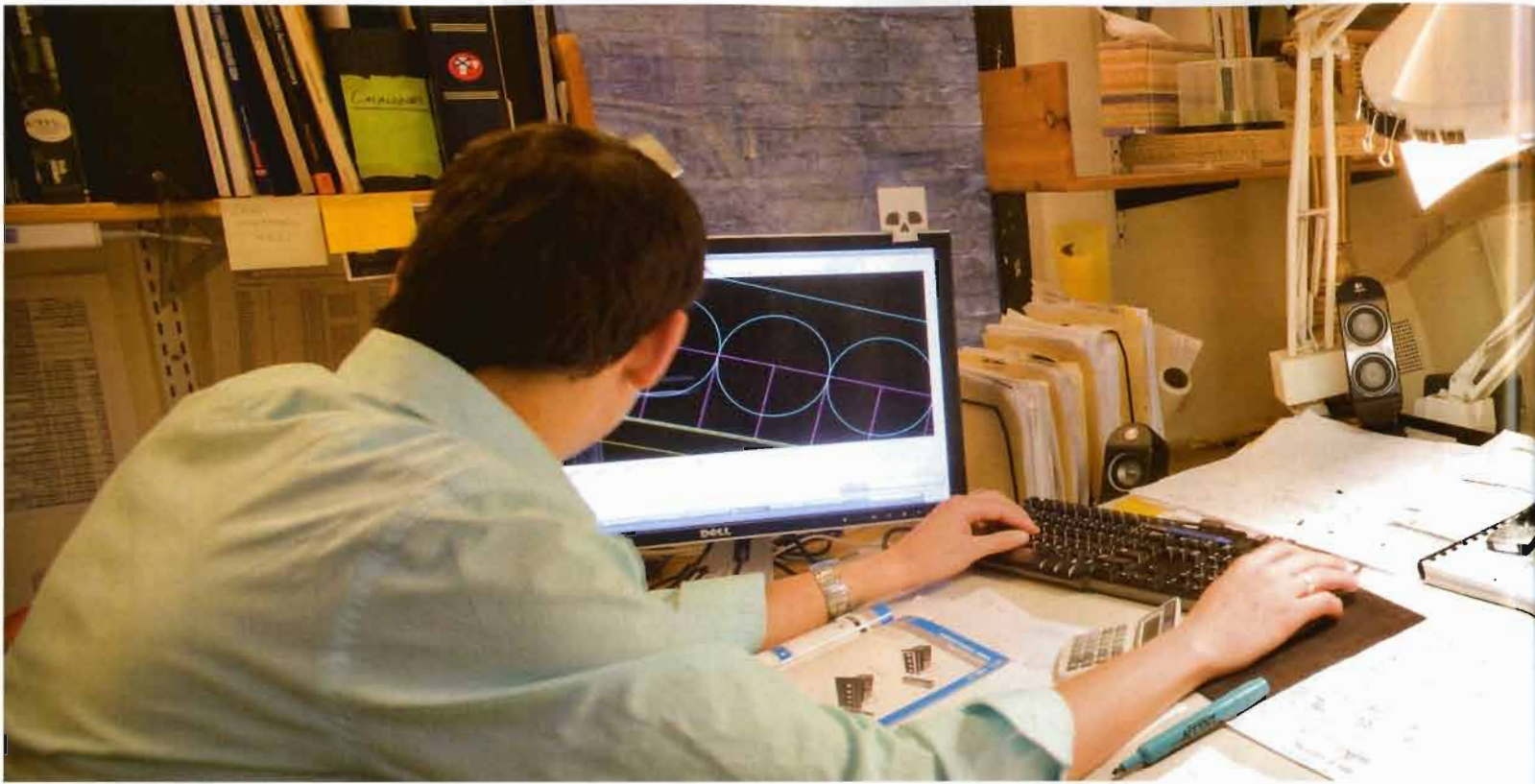
New York City

www.hblighting.com

The loft-like space with a 12-foot-high ceiling and large windows offers the employees of Horton Lees Brogden Lighting Design incredible views of New York City from its location on Union Square. "We see the city sculpted in light throughout the day," says principal Barbara Horton, adding that the 3,500-square-foot office is able to use daylight during 90 percent of the day. New York, where it all started for the firm in 1970, is one of four office locations, with the others in Boston, Los Angeles, and San Francisco. The interior design was kept simple to amplify the great views, and Horton says that there was no specific inspiration for the office. Large enclosed spaces in the center contain the library and conference room, while the rest of the area is open with low partitions. "We started with higher partitions for privacy and found it was not team building," Horton explains. Now, everyone can communicate and collaborate across the partitions including the principals, who do not have private offices. The openness throughout the space is critical for the designers to work together, and Horton says the space functions very well to encourage camaraderie and communication.

Bold colors adorn the walls of Horton Lees Brogden Lighting Design's New York office (left), which has low partitions to foster communication. Large windows (below) allow for daylight and great views of the city.





Candela, which is a division of electrical engineering and technology consulting firm Sparling, has been at its current Seattle location since its creation in 1989, but has occupied different floors of the building. It just finished a remodel in January 2008, during which the workstations were reduced in size by eliminating drafting tables. Instead, principal Denise Fong explains that more spaces were created throughout the office where people could gather casually to meet and collaborate on projects. The workstations also were moved closer to the windows so that people had better access to daylight. "Everyone seems to like the more collaborative space and amazingly, no one has complained about the smaller workstations," Fong says. The flip side of having a more open office is that having a private conversation is more difficult, however, Candela built three "phone booth" rooms, each with a different furniture configuration that also can be used for an occasional nap or nursing mothers. And for visitors from other locations or those without a permanent desk, "hotel stations" in the office can be used on a temporary basis but allow each person to be connected as if they were sitting in their home office with a phone line and computer link. In the interest of sustainability and experimentation, Fong explains, a lighting control system was used to illuminate the open office areas and help foster the daylight coming into the space.

Candela's Seattle office was remodeled in January 2008, during which employee workstations were reduced in size while more space was created for casual collaboration on projects (right). So far, the staff likes the smaller workstations (far right) that now also have access to daylight.

Candela
Seattle
www.candela.com





Focus Lighting | New York City | www.focuslighting.com

The office space for Focus Lighting, a lavender row house on Manhattan's Upper West Side a few blocks from the Hudson River, is designed to be an environment of experimentation and creativity. Principal Paul Gregory says the structure of the work area "has the feeling of an ever-growing tree, with each design studio branching throughout the office and sprouting creativity in various directions." The space is based on "great people doing great work," he adds, noting that the office is filled with items that are conducive to a creative environment such as models, mock-ups, a lot of light, and images of sunsets, rainbows, and fields of flowers. A full mock-up space in the studio allows the design team to turn on and test fixtures, lamps, and new materials so clients can see exactly what will appear in their project. Gregory says previous work by Focus Lighting is showcased throughout because "we draw inspiration from our previous projects, from other great work from around the world, and from each other."

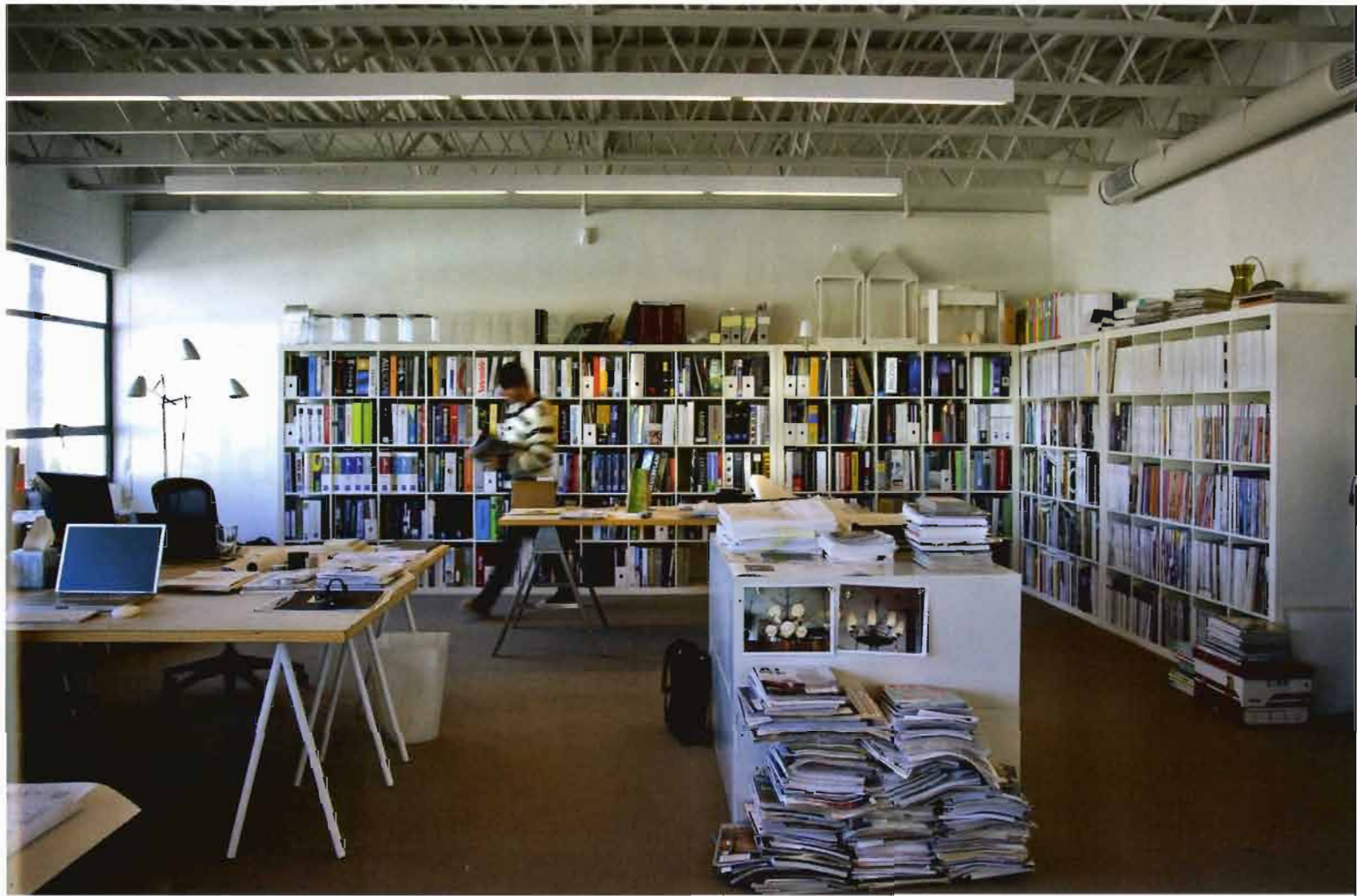
The office environment of Focus Lighting (top), designed to be one of experimentation and creativity, has a homey feel as it is located in a row house in Manhattan. Photos, awards, mock-ups, previous projects, and other items are spread throughout the office (above) to help inspire employees as they work on lighting designs.

Schuler Shook has been at its current location since 2001. As the third space since the firm was founded, principal Robert Shook says something they added to the current office is more meeting areas, both informal and formal. Principal Jim Baney explains that the office is designed to foster interaction as the lighting designers work in teams of two, with each team's work area connected by a central drawing storage rack and integrated work surface. By typical open office standards, according to Shook, the designers' workstations are large, allowing space to spread out and store drawings, in addition to giving designers quick access to documents when a client calls about a project. Everyone at the firm, including the partners, has an open office because "we consider it valuable for anyone to be able to listen to his or her colleagues," Shook says. "We learn from each other." The open office space primarily is illuminated by fluorescent and ceramic metal halide sources, and its lighting design is energy efficient, using 1.1 watts per square foot.

All employees at Schuler Shook, including the principals, have an open work area in the Chicago office (right). The openness of the office is meant to promote conversation among colleagues and allow everyone in the office to learn from each other.

Schuler Shook
Chicago
www.schulershook.com





Sean O'Connor Associates Lighting Consultants | Los Angeles | www.seanoconnorassociates.com



At its fourth office in 10 years, Sean O'Connor Associates Lighting Consultants is still settling into its one-year-old digs in Los Angeles. Before the move to the West Coast, the firm was located in Philadelphia, where it still maintains an office. The L-shaped space in Los Angeles has northern and western exposures and is set up so the studio component of the office runs the length of the north wall, taking advantage of the northern sky with diffused daylight. Principal Sean O'Connor says the space offers great views of Beverly Hills and Hollywood Hills, and "even when the office is a mess, there is always the fantastic view and Los Angeles weather." A proponent of an open office because it allows for the easy exchange of ideas and keeps a quick pace in regard to work, O'Connor explains that this location does have an enclosed conference room for privacy. In choosing the space, O'Connor admits he was very particular about site selection. "I wanted to be centrally located here in Los Angeles, and I wanted the building to be somewhat architectural," he says. "The building has a nice Bauhaus vibe to it, and I love the expanses of operable windows and views." While O'Connor is inspired by art, fashion, architecture, and interiors, he says what he and his team wanted for the office was a clean, calm space with a sense of architecture and detail that allowed for open communication.

The Los Angeles office for Sean O'Connor Associates Lighting Consultants (above) has northern and western exposures and offers superb views of the surrounding areas. Having an open office (left) results in easier communication and keeps projects moving along quickly.

SCHULER SHOOK PHOTOS: JIM NEWBERRY;
SEAN O'CONNOR ASSOCIATES LIGHTING CONSULTANTS PHOTOS: MICHAEL DARTER