

Informal Spaces

Q+A: Steelcase Partners with HBO's Silicon Valley



As *Silicon Valley* creators prepared to film the fourth season of the popular HBO comedy, the tech hub's favorite fictional startup had a new opportunity. Some of the main characters were moving into a venture capitalist's office. The move had significance to the storyline. Would the rag-tag team of coding geniuses hit it big? Set decorator, David Cook, was tasked with creating the perfect places for this new story to play out. He knew the space had to tell a story and communicate a new way of working for the characters. After doing some research, he reached out to Steelcase to help create the ideal work environment. Cook sat down with 360 to discuss the partnership.

360: As a set decorator, tell us about the importance of place to your characters?

David: Setting and place tell everything about the characters. Often those visual references are the audience's initial introduction to the characters. They help relay everything about them.

Size, space and furniture give you a visual idea of who the characters are. They are a window into their personality. They help viewers understand how they work and how they live their lives.

360: How did you develop the look and feel of the workplace you created in *Silicon Valley*?

David: When we began working on the Bream Hall office set, we spent a lot of time researching and developing an overall aesthetic that we were aiming to achieve. We scoured everything that was available to us. We did a lot of online research looking at venture capitalist offices and technology company offices. We looked all over the world from Russia, to other countries in Europe, to Silicon Valley itself, of course. In the end, we made selections based on particular characters. We wanted their offices to best represent them and their personal brand.

360: What's different about decorating a set than designing for home or commercial interiors? What elements need to be considered on set that other design professionals may not need to consider?

David: For one thing, nothing on a set is permanent. That gives us a lot of freedom, but also has its restrictions. It's always fun to develop a new set and come up with ideas of how you want it to look and feel. Obviously, with a show like *Silicon Valley*, most of these characters have such strong personalities – it helps form our decisions because we know and love the characters so much.

Our most difficult obstacle is the element of time. Often, we get a new script and have to have the set finalized and ready for shooting by the end of the week, sometimes even faster.



360: Your set this season features Steelcase, Coalesse and turnstone furniture. What was the reason behind this partnership?

David: I reached out to Steelcase early on because after just beginning our research I knew these offices would need to look like they were a working, thriving and successful venture capitalist company. I wanted to convey a level of status to the audience as quickly as possible. At the same time, I wanted it to look tasteful and refined. Because of who the characters are, I wanted them to have a level of elegance within the workspace.



360: Tell us about your decision to choose a natural material like wood in many of the settings.

David: We wanted this set to look polished, new and strong. We wanted it to feel approachable, not hard and shiny. Mostly, we wanted something that was strong but also reflected our female venture capitalists' personalities. We used a graphite walnut finish that was clean and modern. I think it balanced well with the characters.

360: Did any of the choices you ended up making for your set surprise your team?

David: We were very fortunate with the partnership. The entire team — directors, actors, everyone — was blown away at how perfect everything worked on our sets. We would not have been able to achieve the look we were after or had it seem so seamless and appropriate if it weren't for the furniture provided by Steelcase, Coalesse and turnstone.

Most of the options we are given as set decorators come from prop houses. They've been used, and often, aren't the most current. This was a huge opportunity for the show, and us as an art department, to do something special.

You can watch Season 4 of *Silicon Valley* to find a variety of Steelcase, Coalesse and turnstone products at 10 pm ET on HBO.



Rebecca Charbauski
Senior Communications Specialist



Rebecca, an Emmy-winning journalist, reports on global research impacting the places where people work, learn and heal. Over her career, Rebecca spent 17 years covering local and national news events on television and a variety of digital platforms. She directed a digital news group in Kansas City for three years before becoming news director in Grand Rapids, Michigan for more than five years. Prior to Steelcase, Rebecca worked with one of the four largest media groups in the United States to coordinate news coverage among 48 newsrooms from the east to west coast.

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