

# **PDR: Pushing Conventional Boundaries of Space**

By Jackie Wheat

*As PDR's director of design, Jackie Wheat leads and develops the interior design and visual communications teams. Her work transforms program and strategy into thoughtful design solutions tuned to enrich a client's vision, identity and culture. Jackie wrote for 360 about her team's experience transforming their own workplace.*

Based in Houston, PDR specializes in the delivery of innovative workplace design. Our space is a think tank for innovation and creativity. It reflects who we are. A few years ago we had the opportunity to design our new office, and we became the client. The project was a very personal one. We knew our own office would be the perfect place to show our ability to live the perspective we bring to our clients every day.

## **DESIGN PHILOSOPHY**

Before we started, we scrutinized how we work, where we work and what our culture demands. We wanted our brand to greet you when you walked in the door and to be present throughout our space. We challenged our technology requirements today and what the future of our work might need. Then, we began the workplace design process and developed our guiding principles in tandem with a robust change management model. We conducted surveys, collected and synthesized data and engaged all employees in a change management plan.

We practice a design philosophy of modularity, mobility, and flexibility. Our project work requires us to be agile and adaptive. Just like our clients, our office needs to be highly responsive to the changing demands, scale and complexity of our work.

## **CREATIVE FOCUS**

PDR is a hybrid design firm; one-third business consulting, two-thirds workplace architecture. PDR works everyday inside clients' companies, developing the next generation workplace.

We knew our space needed to focus on the creative process and enable the behaviors in the workplace that allow us to think big, be fearless and be inspired. Because we take a multi-disciplined approach to projects — design, strategy, and change management — we require a workplace that would serve a variety of work modes and styles. We had to think about our process for getting work done and what we needed for fruitful collaboration.

## **OUR ENVELOPE**

Our large open studio on the 39th floor has magnificent views of our great city of Houston. We are surrounded by floor-to-ceiling glass in three directions which allows the space to be flooded with natural light. It creates a special connection with the city all around us. Our office design is polished and intentional, relevant and high-performing. It is primarily bright white and yellow, breathing energy into our space. It celebrates what is important to us — our people and our work.

From 2013 to 2016, PDR designed 8,000,000 square feet of high performance workspace globally and improved the productivity and wellbeing of over 25,000 people at work.

As we began to design our new office around this bright, connected architectural envelope, we knew that no space would have a single purpose. A diversity of spaces would accommodate everything from large corporate gatherings to isolation and focus for an individual. Our change management efforts would educate the office about how adaptable their new workspaces could be. A meeting space with a table for ten could function as a room for two people to spread out and visualize their work. A quiet room for individual focus work could accommodate an extra seat for an impromptu meeting. Our boardroom, for example, is often used for brainstorming or dry runs for presentations by small groups because there are two large walls of white board and a large flat screen. It is the perfect “Big Ideas” room.

## **PUSHING CONVENTIONAL BOUNDARIES**

We push the conventional boundaries of space and adapt it to what we need, when we need it. Our front reception area includes moveable tables and storage units and often doubles as the daily lunch table for employees, corporate celebrations or vendor presentations. The living room is often used as a comfortable spot for team meetings, client meetings or rejuvenation. I often see one of my coworkers reading a book during lunch, and another working on her laptop with her feet up on our lounge chair and ottoman. In addition to these more informal areas, the variety of closed meeting spaces support small groups who need to share content internally or externally with clients or consultants.

## **BALANCING OPEN SPACE**

Susan Cain Quiet Spaces from Steelcase help PDR balance open space with the need for privacy.

Unlike traditional firms, our culture supports an environment where everyone sits in the same size open workstation. Our space provides equity for all — meaning it doesn't matter if you're a senior principal or a new hire. This decision communicates a culture of inclusion. Our people work in a bench-style configuration with large storage units along the center aisles that often double as impromptu collaboration spaces.

We balance this open and transparent environment by installing Steelcase Susan Cain Quiet Spaces. The V.I.A. walls offer acoustical privacy to create places designed for focus and heads down work. After our personal space design project began, we listened to our people and learned more of these spaces were needed. They were being used for more than just individual work. We installed more Quiet Spaces and now you'll see people using them to have conversations with a colleague, make a business call or just concentrate on an individual task. Because our job as architects and designers is to figure out the best way to use space, we have the ability to leverage our new work spaces to their highest degree of functionality.

Every day when we walk into our new PDR office, our purpose is reinforced. We believe thoughtful placemaking connects people and inspires organizations to thrive. We live it.

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Jackie Wheat is PDR's design director. Jackie approaches placemaking from the inside out—connecting people to purpose through designs that inspire. She cultivates her professional relationships with the same responsibility and intentionality she brings to her designs. The resulting built environments demonstrate her holistic vision of affecting positive change for individuals, teams and organizations through design.

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## **Steelcase**

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