

Finding Shelter in the Open Plan

Steelcase helps solve for the office privacy problem with patent-pending, curved wraps that shield you like a cove

As companies struggle to fill roles and nudge people back into the workplace, the office needs to do more to draw people in. The office didn't do privacy well before the pandemic and now that people have experienced the benefits of controlling their environment at home, it needs to do an even better job.

The open office got a bad reputation because people ended up feeling exposed – conversations carried, computer screens were visible, and distractions too often prevented people from focusing. People want to be able to do better work in a place that's designed to help them be productive. Today's hybrid office needs new office privacy solutions to dampen that daily cacophony of distractions.

Product designers wanted to give people more control over their environment which inspired them to create Steelcase Flex Personal Spaces with Privacy Wraps.

The wraps are designed with human nature in mind. Their unique curved frame design is inspired by a cove – or a sheltered bay. Coupled with a sustainable one-piece knit covering and paired with uniquely shaped desks for ultimate flexibility, these patent-pending privacy wraps make for a cocoon of comfort that can be quickly and easily rearranged to support different work modes or styles – just like the home office many workers have enjoyed since the beginning of the pandemic.

According to recent Steelcase global research, privacy and the need for dedicated places for focus work in the office is at a premium. In fact, 66% of people asked say privacy is the top need.

Steelcase Design Director William Bennie says, essentially, the traditional office desk needs an upgrade.

“How do you create a sense of comfort, security and control? How do we create more humanizing solutions?”

WILLIAM BENNIE | Steelcase Design Director

With extensive prototyping over the past few years, Bennie and his team created nuanced changes to the traditional desk panel that enhanced its offerings of privacy, flexibility and personal control. They blended materiality and shape to offer a space that envelopes people in a way other wraps or screens do not – delivering privacy in an entirely new way. Quick and easy adaptations allow people to achieve the level of privacy they need – whether it's for video calls or sustained heads-down focus time.

“We wanted it to shelter you in a way that creates a visceral feeling in people,” says industrial design principal John Allen. “When you’re sitting in it, you feel safe, like a security blanket – it’s not something that can be explained, it needs to be experienced.”

KNIT TO FIT

The curved design and optional light is found in the Steelcase Flex Personal Spaces privacy wrap.

A large, curved shape became the foundation of the privacy wrap’s frame, allowing for more visual and acoustic privacy. For Allen, one of his favorite features of that curved shape is the optional canopy light, which provides three different levels of brightness in the workspace. But that innovative frame shape came with a major challenge: how to cover it.

The taller structure and curve of the wrap provides a shelter for focus.

The need for an innovative textile led the Steelcase design team to Camira, a UK-based maker of complex 3-D knit. Steelcase and Camira were able to devise a one-piece cover that could be pulled over the structure “like a sweater,” says Allen. Known as knit to fit, Camira’s designs meet the exact measurements of a specific product, ensuring perfectly fitted fabrics with zero excess material waste.

The Patent-pending tufting technique secures the covering to the frame.

In addition to finding a new way to address the covering, designers and engineers had to find a way to secure the covering to the frame. That’s where its patent-pending star tufting method came into play. The unique tufting provides visual interest and a residential feel within the space.

The pin-tackable cover allows for greater personalization and organization.

The pin-tack wrap cover also allows for an easy visual display, note organization and personalization. A nametag accessory helps people personalize the space or use it to communicate to their team when they do not want to be disturbed, and a hook provides a place for people to hang small items like a bag or headphones.

DESIGNED WITH THE PLANET IN MIND

Sustainability is top of mind for designers as they develop new products. The privacy wraps for Steelcase Flex Personal Spaces contain seven core sustainability attributes.

Reusable and Repairable – Knit to fit styling allows companies to easily change the color of the cover without having to replace the entire product, allowing for greater longevity of use. The knit is also easily repairable on site. In addition, Steelcase has created replacement parts of almost everything on the wraps, allowing facilities managers to fix broken components rather than replace the entire wrap.

Recycled Content + Materiality – The Camira Knit covering is made from 100% post-consumer recycled polyester made from plastic bottles and is also 100% recyclable. The trimming process has zero waste because it's knit-to-fit, leaving behind no scrap yarn. Plus, the entire Privacy Wrap can be disassembled into recyclable components such as steel, plastic and recyclable polymers. Designers and engineers made specific decisions to avoid gluing or permanently attaching any components to facilitate end-of-life management.

Sustainable Packaging – A multi-pack bulk packaging option reduces the amount of packaging waste significantly.

Design – Since the fabric on the Privacy Wrap fits perfectly, assembly requires no additional cutting or sewing that would otherwise lead to unnecessary time and scrap on-site.

Energy – The Camira Knit manufacturing process uses Flatbed Weft technology, which requires significantly less energy than a traditional woven fabric loom.

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