

Why Materials Make a Difference to Your Workplace

Paint, texture and fabric can breathe new life into an old space. It's why so many people paint their walls as soon as they buy a house. They want to make it their own. Details within a space tell a story and it's those details that can make a space feel like home. More and more people are looking for that same feeling while at work. Warm, humanistic and natural materials are being layered together to create inspiring spaces where people want to work.

"We see interests in making spaces more eclectic, not so monolithic in colors patterns and settings," says Bruce Smith, Steelcase director of global design.

Smith reminds us words like "warm, humanistic and natural" conjure up different ideas for different people. With thoughtfully-designed spaces and a layering of materials, designers are able to appeal to more people within one particular space. Here's a look at four ways to combine materials to enhance the workplace.

ENCOURAGE AUTHENTICITY

"The things that are really compelling to us are things where you see, or think you see, the hand of man in creation," explains Smith.

People are drawn to a diverse set of surface materials with complex patterns and textures found in nature. Knots, visible grain and color variations that used to signal imperfections are now exactly what many customers are seeking from their wood surfaces.

These nods to biophilia support a natural, authentic feeling within the workplace. Research tells us these links to living things help people feel and think better.

PROMOTE PERSONALIZATION

Materials can help organizations advance individuality and brand identity. Scientists in the Journal of Environmental Psychology published research showing that personalization contributed to employees' positive cognitive and emotional wellbeing and led to enhanced thinking and better coping skills.

Sophisticated paint colors, for example, can create an original atmosphere. New Lux Coatings from Steelcase include finishes pulled directly from nature, such as Obsidian, which is indicative of volcanic glass.

SUPPORT SUSTAINABILITY

Create a place with purpose by combining materials that don't just make the office a better place, but make the world a better place as well. Two new entries into designer's toolkits from Steelcase are born from materials that used to end up in the waste basket.

The New Black fabric collection is made of 100 percent recycled materials, creating five distinctly beautiful patterns. Boucle yarns bring a warm, comfortable, human feeling and [sustainable textiles](#) to the workplace. [Planked oak and walnut veneers](#) are crafted with leftover wood pieces that previously failed to meet high standards of uniform perfection. Now, it's the imperfections that shine as designers seek to highlight the unique characteristics of wood.

IMPROVE EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

“The most successful organizations are now turning their attention to employee wellbeing as a way to gain emotional, financial and competitive advantage,” says [Tom Rath](#), a researcher, author and filmmaker who studies the role of human behavior in business, health and wellbeing

By creating a workplace where people feel like they can be themselves, where they feel like their environment is trustworthy and authentic and where they feel purpose in their work, leaders can enhance emotional wellbeing. A [human-centered](#) design that includes warm, comfortable and informal spaces can help.

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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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