





Making Light of It

SchappacherWhite solves a New York-headquartered internet firm's problem of compensating for light loss in spaces with blocked-up windows.

RECENTLY MERGED with another firm of internet professional service providers, New York-headquartered Red Sky had been fast outgrowing its bi-level premises even before the new staff contingent arrived. But instead of having to search for another location, the company found itself in the envious position of merely having to go one flight down for extra accommodations. Yes, the 5th floor, for 20 years occupied by a purveyor of sheet music, had become vacant. Thus a new lease was negotiated and signed, adding 7,800 sq. ft. for a total of 23,400 sq. ft. Plans were made to consolidate previously scattered website designers

on the newly acquired expanse. And SchappacherWhite, recommended by a client, was engaged to design an appropriate environment for the new settlers. All this in an early 20th-century structure on Manhattan's Park Avenue South.

But then, too late to consider alternatives, came nasty news: the large open void formed by the L-shaped venue's right-angled wings was to be filled with a high-rise hotel, thus barricading two light-admitting window walls. Fainter hearts might have despaired. But the client and his designers—the former in the person of website design director Sung Chang; the latter duo comprising partners →

Opposite: Stained-walnut custom bench with neoprene cushions faces translucent wall sheltering conference room; backdrop is of perforated metal sandwiched between acrylic sheets.

Above: Work station cluster, looking to café and grid of Kalwall acting as light box for presentations of website visuals. Left of desk are mobile Pick-Up carts and portable file drawers.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDREW BORDWIN



Steve Schappacher and Rhea White—faced up to it. Remedial steps were devised, not only to compensate for the natural-light obstruction, but also to provide a milieu tailored to fit the unorthodox work ways of website designers. Interestingly enough, Chang, who just happens to hold a degree in architecture from Columbia and once did film work in California, seemed especially interested in the project's visual aspects, relying on his designers to work out spatial programming details for a staff of 41 (of 150 overall). One senses that Schappacher admires the Red Sky executive for his active involvement in both the aesthetics and pragmatic concerns affecting the targeted occupants.

Website designers, the spokesman explains, are a breed of their own, apt to shun conventional schedules and work ways. Young and brilliant, they keep long, erratic hours, working solo at the computer or teaming up first with one colleague, then another, and perhaps going on to join a group discussion. They might pull up one of several

height-adjustable Stitz stools so as to kibitz over a seated staffer's shoulder; or shift the venue to systems furniture clusters, corridor gathering spaces, open lounge spots, or the small café. Also popular for change-of-pace breaks are Schappacher's versions of bean bags—one of several custom seating designs, ranging from benches to banquette enclosures—surely a therapeutic aid for relaxing or recharging creative brain cells. All over the floor, it's a work force in flux. Just one thing is certain: come 7:30 p.m., everyone is watching *The Simpsons*.

For this precocious group, then, the designers first rehabilitated the space, razing wonky plaster walls, shot-blasting vinyl tiles worn down to the concrete slab, and removing mazes of metal shelving. Next they forged and implemented two strategies to make up for the loss of daylight. One, all objects were carefully positioned so that sight lines to retained windows are uninterrupted from any vantage point. Secondly, translucent Kalwall panels with aluminum studs, →

Above: Long view of six work station clusters, each seating four to nine. Library is at right.

Opposite: Communication systems plug into wind poles, seen here in library but used throughout.



along with back-lit screens of orange construction netting sandwiched between acrylic sheets, were deployed throughout so as to transmit light flow internally.

Perhaps most important among vital ingredients are the work stations. Having been modified in collaboration with Vitra, they are deployed in six clusters, each seating four to nine people. Chief components are stained wood-veneer tables with low dividers holding clip-on shelves. Bonus features are caster-supported Pick-Up carts holding space for files and other possessions. The containers can be put away in a central storage place, or be rolled from one place to another in synchronization with the staffer's work pattern. As Schappacher notes, it's easier to move people than furniture.

Brilliant bright green and orange—the latter hue is especially prominent since, as it were, it serves as a memorial wall marker for the late lamented lost windows—act as added antidotes to light loss. In the name of economy, rubberized drapery fabrics were bought in the garment district, big plastic light bubbles came from the Bowery, and entry bench cushions are of industrial neoprene.

In collaboration with Brian Tolman and Robert Nassar, it took just 20 weeks to do the \$87/sq.-ft. job. Its success is attested by Schappacher's and White's follow-up commission to design the just-added fourth floor for Red Sky systems engineers. —Monica Geran

Above: The café, seating eight, is backed with banquette enclosure designed by Schappacher.

Opposite: Service corridor runs parallels to walls whose orange stripe marks the line once pierced with windows. Ultrasuede bean bags provide seating for impromptu confabs or work on laptops.

CUSTOM ENTRY BENCH: EXCELLENT CABINETRY. MILLWORK, OTHER CUSTOM FURNITURE: WOODCRAFT INTERIORS CORP. SYSTEMS FURNITURE, TASK CHAIRS: VITRA. UPHOLSTERY FABRIC: TORAY ULTRASUEDE. CARPET: TRETTFORD BY EURO-TEX. LIGHTING: CAPRI (TRACKS); FORUM (UPLIGHTS); LIGHT-OLIER (PENDANTS); IKEA (DESK LIGHTS). FIBERGLASS: KALWALL. STITZ STOOLS: VECTA. SIDE TABLES: KNOLL. LIBRARY CHAIR: SITAG. STARCK PANTRY CHAIRS: LUMINAIRE. PAINT: BENJAMIN MOORE. ENGINEER: MACK ENGINEERING. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: ATCO CONSTRUCTION COMPANY.



