

The latest retrofitted offices are not just in former industrial spaces. Today's workplace can pop up in an old house, a church, or even a bank. And they aren't just offices anymore.

Werk State



ZGF Architects designs a “choose-your-own-adventure” office space for Expensify Portland. By Sydney Franklin

Banking on Flexible Design

Expensify is an expense management software company, so it's fitting that its newest office in Portland, Oregon, is set inside one of the city's historic bank buildings. Located on the corner of Southwest 5th Avenue and Stark Street, the 103-year-old First National Bank, or the “marble temple,” does not look like the home of an emerging tech enterprise. But the San Francisco-based brand has outfitted the four-story atrium and other spaces to respond to its need for flexibility without compromising the integrity of the structure.

Designed by ZGF Architects, the office reflects Expensify's self-described “choose-your-own-adventure” work setting. Employees have an array of seating options, from a 41-foot-long communal table to a plush swing set, a classy boardroom, and a speakeasy-style salon with leather booths by Restoration Hardware—all except for personal desks. This goal of creating a 100 percent agile workplace drove all design decisions both large and small, according to Alan Gerencer, principal of ZGF.

Expensify also wanted its office to be a place where employees could directly connect with each other and the national landmark building. Gerencer explained that the interior was completely shelled out when they began work. “It was bare concrete,” he said. “Our effort was to define this space and still respect what was existing.”

To do this, ZGF referenced both the obvious and minute details on the building's exterior as well as its Art Deco, skylit interior. For example, the firm imagined a set of floating conference rooms immediately visible from the bank's main entrance that resemble a tree house. Built with glass and blackened steel, the triad of windows on the boxy structures mirror the bank's expansive vertical windows. Angular chandeliers from Nemo Lighting, reminiscent of the opulent hanging lamps found in old banks,

gleam inside. Additionally, the oak flooring by Kährs and millwork used throughout the entire office pay homage to the patterns of oak leaves and acorns on the historic bank vault doors.

Even the oak wood-clad private booths on the third floor, designed for quiet work and conversation, feature a Scandinavian gabled roof design that's defined with the exact shape and proportions of the classical X-shaped balustrades and grilles nearby. All of these varied work areas allow employees to interact with the historic space on many different levels.

Because Expensify is leasing the office space, ZGF laid out the interior architecture to “gently touch” its historic core. “This whole structure could essentially be removed,” Gerencer said, “and no one would ever know Expensify was there.”

Above left and right: Wooden finishes and black metalwork bring a warm and sophisticated feeling to the office space. Lounge chairs add even more comfort, like the BuzziNordic that lines the edge of the stair.

Right: Portland-based company Mallet Bespoke Furniture created the communal table in the lobby. Imber pendants by Cerno hang above it, illuminating the wood and the mesh chairs from Source.

