

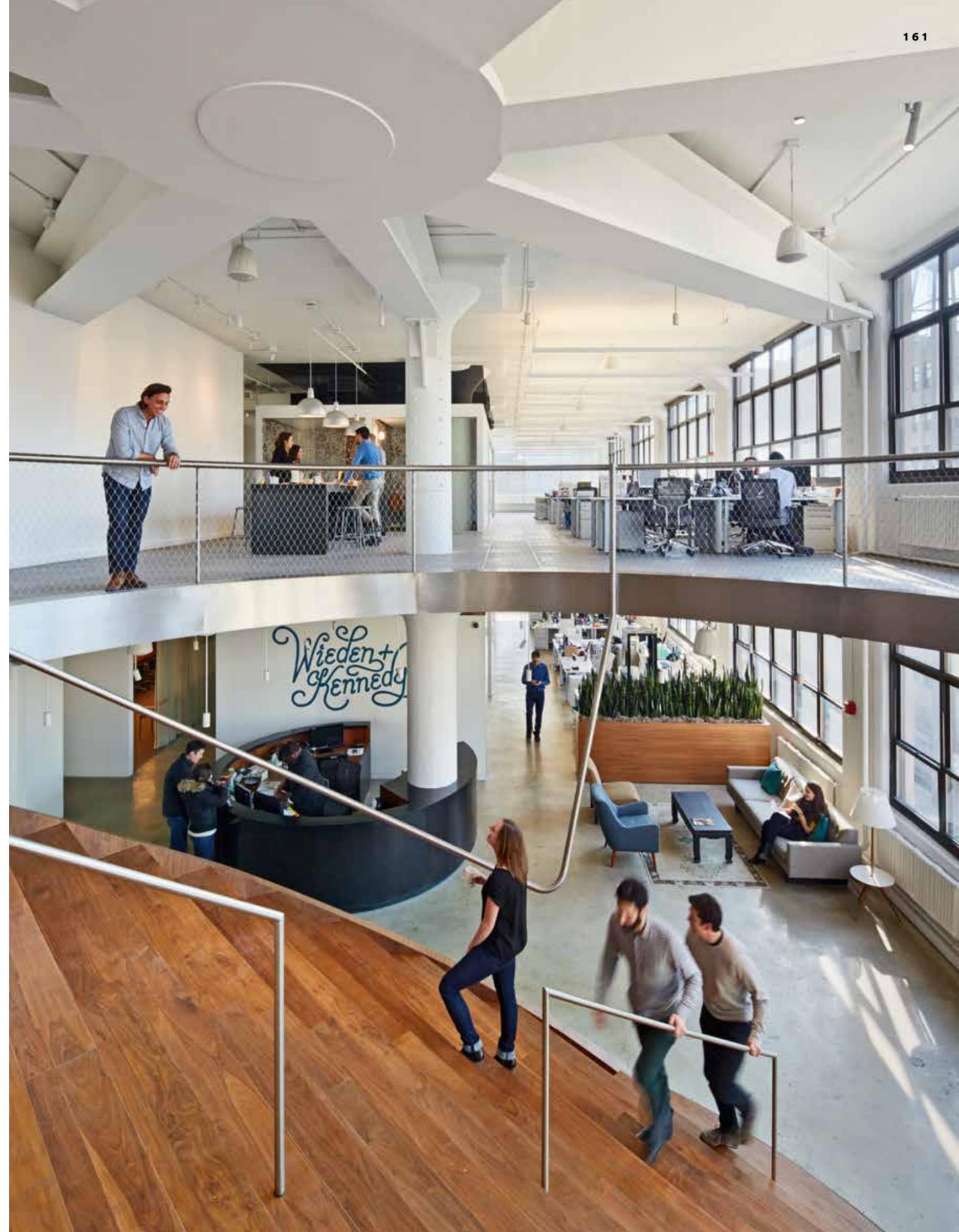
# Well- Rounded Work

WORKAC PIERCED THE FLOORS WITH TWO CIRCULAR APERTURES TO CONNECT THE LEVELS AT WIEDEN+KENNEDY IN NEW YORK.

WORDS *Dan Rubinstein*

**‘We all agreed we didn’t want anything that felt gimmicky,’ says Neal Arthur, managing director of the Manhattan office of Portland-based ad agency Wieden+Kennedy. ‘It’s one of the things that happens at a lot of agencies. It’s easy to fall into the we’re-so-fun trap. For us, the people that work here will be the ones to bring that personality; it didn’t need to be the concern of the architecture. We wanted to create something timeless.’**

Large staircases connecting the three levels at Wieden+Kennedy New York encourage circulation from one floor to another.





In the reception area, visitors can sit in the space under the Coin Stair.

**WIEDEN + KENNEDY**, known for legendary campaigns such as Nike's 'Just Do It', recently redesigned its SoHo office in Manhattan while expanding to another floor. Founded in 1982 and one of the largest independent firms globally, the agency is no stranger to collaborating with high-profile architects and interior designers. In 2007 the firm commissioned artist Patrick Dougherty to create a lounge – an organic 'nest' of vines and branches – inside the lauded 2000 office by Brad Cloepfil of Allied Works.

The previous design of the New York office, which Arthur describes as 'museum-like', became outdated in the rapidly evolving advertising industry, where the relaxed, martini-lunch atmosphere is dead and buried. 'We have tons of tech people now – developers, graphic designers and interactive designers,' he says, 'and social media is happening very much in real time. We don't have the luxury of letting the art director and copywriter go away for five weeks and then come back with an idea. Everything's much more fluid, and it's much quicker.'

The resulting renovation, a 4645-m<sup>2</sup> three-storey space designed by architects Amale Andraos and Dan Wood of WORKac, emphasizes work over play, focus over frivolity, and congeniality over preciousness. The firm lives

in a massive early 20<sup>th</sup>-century building in SoHo, with floors designed to accommodate large, heavy printing presses. Thick columns play a large part, so Andraos and Wood knew they had to maximize the space and, in particular, to provide ample opportunities for various types of meetings: informal one-on-one chats, department-wide gatherings, and even semipublic events for dozens of people.

'When they reached out to us here, they had a very generic open office,' says Andraos. 'You kind of saw everything at once. There was no hierarchy, but at the same time they were expanding, so they were concerned about maintaining a sense of connection over three floors.'

WORKac researched the culture of work, studying milestones in the creation of workplaces. The duo felt a swinging back from the relaxed – some might say juvenile – interiors that were all the rage during the last boom and before the crisis. 'The workspace is fascinating to us, because it's in such transition right now. Work has always tried to be something other than work – work as home, work as play. Here, we wanted work to be *work*.' She says they focused on 'how they worked' in order to develop 'an analysis of their work in process. And it was all about meetings.' ↵

## Wieden+Kennedy New York

**Location** 150 Varick Street, New York, NY 10013 USA **Design** WORKac (work.ac)

**Lighting design** Town and Gardens (townandgardens.com)

**Landscape design** Diversified Systems (divsystems.com) **Area** 4645 m<sup>2</sup>

**Completion** March 2014

Photos Raymond Adams



One column was removed to accommodate the lower staircase: the Coin Stair. Thanks to a structure added for reinforcement, the four floors above can support the approximately 975 kg per m<sup>2</sup> for which the building was originally designed.



It took three months to install the asterisk-shaped steel structure that stabilizes the opening for the Coin Stair.

**'The idea of subtraction is really interesting to us'**

The use of circles instead of squares shaved off square metres, freeing them for other purposes.



**‘You work here. There’s this idea about connection, about density, about encounters’**

The largest staircase doubles as small auditorium and informal meeting place, while providing a seating area underneath.





Model highlighting the Outdoor Park, a double-height open-air terrace.

**‘We wanted to celebrate the urban setting’**

‘The W+K office in New York is organized into groups of 20 to 25 people, so the architects gave each group its own ‘neighbourhood’ with a lounge, a small conference room, an over-the-counter meeting space, and two phone booths or smaller spaces. ‘A lot of it was in reaction to how the previous office had been laid out like a call centre,’ says Wood, explaining that employees leaving the lift ‘felt like everybody turned around to look at them’, as if they were ‘very exposed’. To accommodate all the different meeting spaces, WORKac carefully shrank personal workstations, shaved inches from tables and minimized dead spaces, such as those between furniture and columns. ‘Being in New York, it became a study in density,’ says Andraos. According to the designers, their space-saving measures increased communal spaces from 6 per cent to nearly 25 per cent of the total office area. Arthur sees a vast difference in how people use the new office. ‘Before, there was always a battle for conference-room space. You sat at your desk and someone would pull up a chair. Now we have all these

different lounges and informal areas. Personal workstations may be smaller, but nobody feels like they lost anything.’

Aesthetics were kept intentionally rugged and low-key to match the firm’s Portland roots – polished concrete, cork, wood and steel – and sustainability and strategic use were crucial as well. ‘We were very strategic in terms of where we inserted design,’ says Andraos. ‘It’s about durability. Whenever we could recycle something – including floors and desks – we did, so as not to overdesign the space.’ The client’s renowned sense of creativity is reflected by the furniture in many of the communal areas, which was chosen by W+K and sourced online through vintage sites such as 1stdibs.

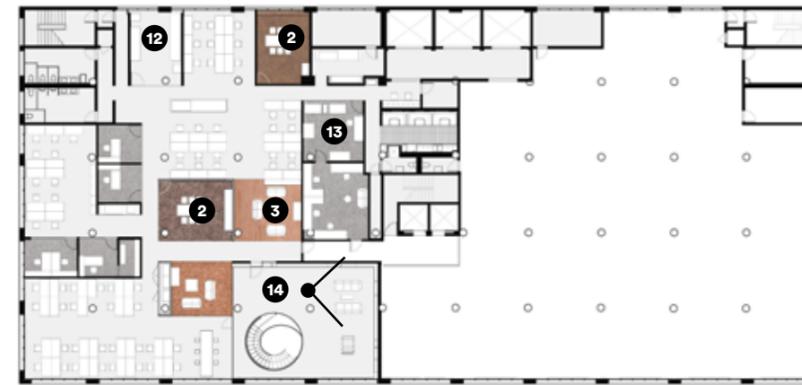
The firm’s wish to encourage circulation from one floor to another informed two major features of the project. Two circular apertures were cut into the floors between storeys to house staircases. Here, too, the use of circles instead of squares shaved off square metres, freeing them for other purposes. The lower staircase, the more



The terrace is equipped with power sources for laptops and a Wi-Fi signal, allowing employees to work outdoors.

Photo Raymond Adams

## Levels and Functions



+ 8

- |                   |                |                |
|-------------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1 Office          | 6 Reception    | 11 Phone booth |
| 2 Conference room | 7 Kitchen      | 12 Workshop    |
| 3 Lounge          | 8 Outdoor Park | 13 Copy room   |
| 4 Picnic room     | 9 Bar          | 14 Library     |
| 5 Coin Stair      | 10 Gym         |                |



Wieden+Kennedy selected its own furniture for the eighth-floor library.



+ 7



Stadium seating doubles as storage space in the seventh-floor gym. Folding chairs can be concealed within or pulled out to transform the space into a theatre.



+ 6



Spaces on the sixth floor accommodate gatherings that range in size from large conferences to two-person meetings.

Of the two, the more ambitious is called the Coin Stair. Another circular form, the staircase itself doubles as small auditorium and informal meeting place, while providing a seating area on the underside. Not only a feat of design, the Coin Stair proved to be an engineering challenge as well. The large opening required the insertion of a nearly 100-tonne asterisk-shaped steel structure to stabilize the surrounding architecture. It took three months to install. One column was removed to accommodate the Coin Stair. Thanks to the new structure, the four floors above can support the approximately 975 kg per m<sup>2</sup> for which the building was originally designed, even though the modern office typically requires much less for normal activity. The second, smaller aperture contains a spiral staircase that ends in a library. 'This idea of subtraction is really interesting to us,' says Andraos, pointing to a master plan they did for New Holland Island in St Petersburg. Currently in development, the project will include similar void-carving techniques.

Two other areas at W+K, while simple in design, offer room for all types of social engagement. The first is the Outdoor Park, a double-height open-air terrace with an ipe-wood deck: the result of a recessed inner wall just behind the façade. 'It's a very urban setting, and that's what we wanted to celebrate,' says Andraos. 'You work here. There's this idea about connection, about density, about encounters.' Equipped with power sources for laptops and a Wi-Fi signal, the terrace invites employees to work outdoors. The second area is a rectangular gym on the seventh floor, complete with ping pong, foosball tables and stadium seating with storage underneath. The benches contain folding chairs, as the space can be transformed into a black-box theatre for film screenings and the like.

All in all, Arthur and his team feel that the new office ticks all the boxes. It's true to the company's Portland roots, keeps the staff creative, and lets them get their work done. 'This space is like an iconic pair of blue jeans,' he says. 'It lets us be more of who we are.' X

## Custom Materials



**MESQUITE ROUNDS FLOORING** from Kaswell was customized to WORKac's specifications. Typically 1.9 cm in depth, these rounds have a depth of just over 30 cm.



**BLACKENED STEEL** was used for the reception desk – a product made by Inform Studio Inc.



**WALNUT WOOD** was the material of choice for the Coin Stair, a dramatic feature in the office that was made by Best-Mark Millwork Corp.



**PERFORATED METAL SHEETS** were made by Brakewell and assembled by SNC Contractors.



**STRIP MAPLE FLOORING** by Custom Floors Design is the predominant material in the gym.



**PLYBOO PANELS** with amber edge grain and custom finish by Inform Studio Inc. feature in the library.



See more about the redesign of Wieden+Kennedy's SoHo office in the July issue of the *Frame* App

The library is connected both visually and physically to lounges beyond.



'The workspace is in such transition right now'