

Are you a sort of Feng Shui of the western corporate world?

Well, in a way, yes. We are looking for harmony in our environments and how they work with our natural selves. We do like to use natural elements such as wood, plants and stone.

We look for a sort of serenity in the environment, but a flexibility that enables the environment to serve our work needs rather than adjusting the work to fit the environment. (Did you notice that all of the walls have casters?) There are times when you want people to move to action. You would be surprised how moving the walls in about a foot all around a break out area speeds up the work process!

We design spaces to be flexible and to adapt to small groups, large groups, or individual work spaces. When you have an adaptable space, you seldom have spaces left vacant as your offices are now, or as this room is most of the time. Again, the key is the environment changes to fit your needs, rather than your trying to squeeze your work into a set environment.

Our designs are based on a huge body of theory on creativity and ergonomics, and an equally huge body of feedback from our clients. It is extremely important for clients to take ownership of their environments and to feel free to move the furniture to facilitate their work. The more they do this, the more adept they become at recognizing their own needs. They are not hesitant to tell us if they need different designs. Almost all of our furniture has been designed to meet specific client needs.

Creativity and Collaboration

Where do you do your best creative work?

Running back and forth between our offices and our meeting room. Just Running. In the shower. At my workstation where I have all of the information I need. (I used to have to move back and forth between my desk and the library.) In seminars where I am forced to sit quietly.

All group creativity begins with individual creativity. So, now we have a scattered group of cubes and meeting rooms. It is not always convenient to move back and forth.

In England, we met for tea three times a day. It was incredibly collaborative. Workstations are good for individual, quiet work. But we need a place to interact. This room could be an ideal place to have that sort of interaction.

We need an inviting space. Perhaps it would help to set up a really nice space and then have some sort of technology to create awareness of what is going on in the space, a video cam. This may stimulate the social interaction necessary to bring life to the room.

What can we do to encourage more collaboration and use of this as a collaborative space?

My first impression of this room was that it was not loved. To bring life to the room, you have to love it, to take ownership of personal elements in it, to bring gifts to it. If you want plants, you have to have someone take the responsibility for them. The same is true with the coffee. If you don't take personal responsibility, the plants will die and the coffee will cause a mess as it did before.

You have to create a culture that flourishes in the room and helps it grow. That is an individual and group responsibility. The culture is just as important as the physical characteristics of the room. Taking ownership of that culture is difficult when you have new people coming in all of the time, but it can be done. It will take an effort for you to decide what you want that culture to be, and then to set the memes, the example for it. But if you make that effort it will pay off.



Design Specifications

What are the characteristics of an ideal collaborative, creative environment--the L3D lab of 2003?

- Windows with light telling about the passing of time
- Comfort
- Convenience
- Use early in the morning
- Variety in color and texture
- Away from daily distractions such as e-mail
- Co-location
- Flexibility to move from individual to group use
- Inviting
- Practical workspace
- Useful to multiple groups, creating a culture of collaborative use
- Technology to create awareness of its use



What are the characteristics that will help this room be more inviting?

- Windows
- Convenient, practical spaces
- Privacy for individual work
- Flat, horizontal work spaces
- An evolving system that will adjust to large group, small group or individual work, or for exhibitions.
- The personal touch. It seems impersonal and severe in here now.
- Perhaps it would be good to hang mobiles or something from the ceiling. I think of the place, in a good way, as being under water. Perhaps we could hang fish mobiles from the ceiling grid.



- It is uninhabited. We need to get people in here. Coffee and such social activities might be an answer, but we have had experiences in the past where no one takes ownership of the coffee service and it simply becomes a mess.
- Comfortable chairs
- Wireless laptops and stations for them
- Community workstations. Perhaps we can have places for students to come in and work on specific projects--temporary personal workstations.
- Create a workshop atmosphere