

## FACE TO FACE

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Photo by Cesar Rubio

Talk about pressure to walk the walk: Many clients may speak of wanting a collaborative office, but for social networking giant Facebook, no other space would do.

Since its inception in 2004, the online platform, which aims to help people communicate with friends, family, and coworkers, has exploded both in users (with more than 100 million individual users now logging on at least once per day) and in staff (numbering more than 850 worldwide and growing). While employees certainly are continuously connected through Facebook's online platform, physically, this explosive growth was hampering in person interaction. By late 2008, the company's home base was spread across 10 buildings throughout downtown Palo Alto, Calif. "As we

got bigger and bigger, it made it more difficult to collaborate and be as productive as we wanted to be," says John Lieu, project manager, design and construction at Facebook. "Centralizing the company was a key element to making us more productive."

Choosing a 1960s building in Palo Alto's Stanford Research Park, Facebook tasked San Francisco-based Studio o+a with bringing this ever-expanding team together under one roof. Time was of the essence as the quicker they could get into the space, the quicker they could get back to work. "From the beginning, we knew this wasn't going to be our final space so we didn't want to over-invest. We're a company that's still growing, and we feel like we still have a lot more to get done so we don't want to really settle into a space and feel like we've made it," says Aaron Sittig, design strategy lead at Facebook. With this in mind, "functionality was paramount. They didn't want anything too finished or too gimmicky," says Denise Cherry, senior designer at Studio o+a. "There had to be a solid reason and function behind every decision."

Studio o+a embraced the industrial aesthetic of the building, which previously housed offices and manufacturing facilities for computer giant Hewlett-Packard, and modified and updated only what was necessary. High-walled cubicle systems on the second floors were dismantled. A large crane, once used to move laboratory equipment, was repurposed into a table that can be moved and pivoted as needed. Cabinetry from the labs were refinished and reused in kitchenettes, where they are complemented by black countertops reminiscent of the old laboratories. In fact, the building's lab spaces, including lead-lined rooms, Bunsen burners and testing facilities, proved an interesting nod to Facebook's position as a social laboratory.

On each of Facebook's two floors, the plan is deliberately open—in fact, there are no private offices, and the only enclosed spaces are the conference rooms where visibility was also encouraged. Each employee, regardless of department or title, works from a 30-in. by 60-in. desk, allowing teams to move and change as needed, and fostering conversation and collaboration across divisions. "It's a driven, motivated culture that's very bottom-up. We try to make everyone feel like they can make a difference in the success of the company, and we take good ideas from everywhere. The way that manifests in our space is in this floor plan where everyone is working in the same fashion, and there is no barrier between someone who showed up a few weeks ago and someone who has been at the company a long time," Sittig explains.

In this vein, a wide range of Facebook employees were involved in the design process. Not only did Studio o+a work with three groups—a facilities team, an advisory group comprising department representatives of all levels, and creative leads including Sittig and Everett Katigbak—but all Facebook employees were kept updated via company blogs and polls. "We would constantly get critiques. It was like going to school every week," notes Primo Orpilla, principal at Studio o+a. Adds Cherry, "The philosophy was that the process should be transparent with no secrets and everyone having a say."

It should come as no surprise, then, that the final design is somewhat like that of a Facebook profile. "The space and the site almost parallel each other in that walking into the building there's a neutral backdrop with a couple of hits of colors," explains Orpilla. "It was very deliberate that we didn't design the entire space. We left it somewhat undone so that each group can put its personal touch on the area. For example, where we may have used supergraphics, we left the wall blank so they can fill it with whatever they want." Adds Cherry, "Employees are encouraged to write on the walls. The idea is that the building will constantly evolve as people come in." Just like a Facebook status update, it seems, commenting is encouraged—in fact, they wouldn't have it any other way.

## **who**

*Project: Facebook. Client: Facebook; Jim Merryman, John Lieu, Aaron Sittig, Everett Katigbak.*

*Architect: Studio o+a; Clem Soga, Sandra Bonderud. Interior designer: Studio o+a; Primo Orpilla,*

*Verda Alexander, Denise Cherry, Perry Stephney, Kyung Chang, Virginie Manichon, Kroeun Dav, Birgit*

*Schweimanns, Almeida Darmawijaya, Soo Emens. Structural engineer: KPFF. Mechanical engineer: Air*

*Systems Inc. Electrical engineer: Elcor Electric. General contractor: SC Builders, Inc. LEED Consultant:*

*Brightworks. Kitchen consultant: RAS Tech, LLC. Furniture dealer: Inside Source, Pod Office.*

*Photographer: Cesar Rubio, Jasper Sanidad.*

## **What**

*Wallcoverings: Wolf-Gordon, One Tree Design, Walltalkers. Paint: ICI Paints, Sherwin Williams, Kelly*

*Moore, Benjamin Moore. Laminate: Nevamar, Formica. Flooring: Constantine. Carpet/carpet tile: Nood*

*Fashion, Milliken Contract, Interface FLOR. Ceiling: Armstrong. Lighting: Day-Brite, Sistemalux, Delray*

*Lighting, Lightolier. Window treatments: The Roman Shade Company. Workstations: KI, Vitra,*

*Steelcase. Workstation seating: Herman Miller, Haworth. Lounge seating: Cartwright, Vitra, Bludot.*

*Cafeteria, dining, auditorium seating: Vitra. Other seating: Commercial Worksurfaces, American Office*

*Furniture, Herman Miller. Upholstery: Maharam, Knoll Textiles. Conference table: Commercial*

*Worksurfaces, American Furniture Systems. Cafeteria, dining, training tables: Commercial*

*Worksurfaces. Crane table: Oliver diCicco Design. Shelving: Rakks. Cabinetmaking: West Coast*

*Powdercoat. HVAC: Acme, Greenheck, Carrier, Trane, Metalarie, Krueger. Security: Schlage.*

*Plumbing fixtures: Kohler, Toto, Elkay, Sloan, Delta, Emerson, Chronomite.*

## **where**

*Location: Palo Alto, CA. Total floor area: 130,000 sq. ft. No. of floors: 2. Average floor size: 65,000 sq.*

*ft. Total staff size: 700-800.*