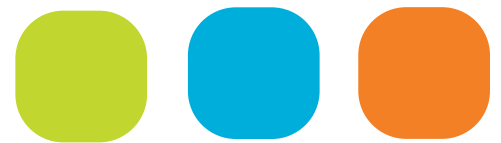


Lost in Space



Designers **speak**
 out on the need
 for small spaces in a world
 where **bigger**
 seems better.

By Roger Yee



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Lost in space, continued

Americans live in a big country, and it's getting bigger every day. Consider this. You can't order a "Small" coffee at Starbucks, where portion sizes start with "Tall." After all, Starbucks is keeping step with portion sizes for popular restaurants (Burger King's basic hamburger, which weighed 3.9 oz. in 1954, now checks in at 4.4 oz.) and packaged foods (the original 1916 Coca Cola bottle held 6.5 fl. oz., while today's Coke starts at 8 fl. oz.).

The expanding of America doesn't end with food, of course. Even as small, energy-conserving cars like the Toyota Prius grab headlines, families keep buying gas-thirsty minivans, pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles that now represent half of all new passenger vehicle sales. Though today's households have fewer children, they have driven up the average size of a new home to 2,320 sq. ft.

Large spaces have become common in our public life as well, acknowledging such driving forces as economy of scale, flexibility for reconfiguration, and the ongoing consolidation of businesses and institutions. One large facility, for example, avoids the redundancy of equipment, energy and staff to operate many smaller ones. A space without walls is faster, cheaper and easier to rearrange than warrens of little rooms. And giantism is a fact of corporate life as one advertising agency, pharmaceutical company, commercial bank, defense contractor, software publisher or hotel chain gobbles up another.

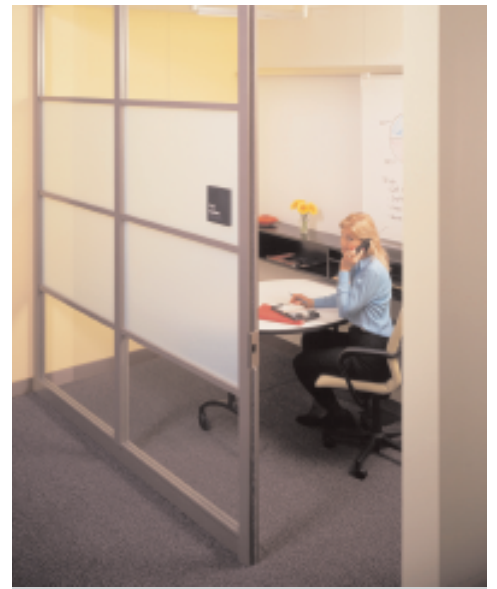
But is bigger always better?

Even big folks need small spaces.

Designers caution that although many people like working, playing and otherwise being active in large groups, they will always face activities that must be performed on an individual level, where privacy, intimacy and isolation help ensure optimum results.

The design challenge is to create successful small spaces that support their bigger surroundings.

Architect John Duvivier, a principal of Bottom-Duvivier, a noted architecture firm in Redwood City, Calif., believes that small spaces will dominate the office environment in years to come.



Small touchdown spaces and intimate collaborative areas support larger office surroundings.

Lost in space, continued

“Big space users will be forced by lean, mean competitors, mobile technology, workers seeking flexible hours, telecommuting and the wastefulness of large, underutilized buildings to change their vision of the workplace,” he predicts. “Offices will become meeting centers with small, individual touchdown areas.”

Meanwhile, offices need more intimate, collaborative spaces, according to interior designer Lisa Bottom, another

principal of Bottom-Duvivier. “Companies have found that serendipitous things happen when you see people. E-mail hasn’t duplicated that,” she explains. “But providing no meeting places except workstations is an invitation to constant interruption, so you need special, informal meeting areas where your staff is located.”

How can these meeting areas signal that they’re part of the office yet different in purpose? Bottom notes

that introducing more visual privacy, residential-style lighting, a change in colors, and soft, comfortable, multi-purpose furniture that can include lounge seating, whiteboards, and storage and tables on wheels all help to assure workers and their supervisors that serious work is being done.

“The corporate culture has to support this kind of environment,” Bottom adds, “and vice versa.”



If workstations are small, it's important to have informal meeting spaces close by.

Smaller for your own good

The need for small enclaves within big facilities transcends business. One reason why teaching hospitals are bulking up is their need for a significant number and variety of patients for effective medical education.

“The modern teaching hospital is a small city,” notes John Kenney, AIA, president of AHSC, a respected healthcare design firm in Tarrytown, N.Y. “Paradoxically, its patients want personal attention along with high technology.”

To break down mass, AHSC addresses the private needs of patients, families and staff with such accommodations as healing gardens, patient rooms designed for visitors, nurses’ substations, small conference rooms and staff lounges, often projecting a home-like ambiance in the furnishings, colors and lighting.

Lost in space, continued

Hide and be seen

How about restaurant patrons, who often like to see and be seen? Arnold Syrop, AIA, president of Arnold Syrop Associates, a prominent New York City restaurant design firm, finds that diners enjoy both the big dining room and the intimate table setting.



Nooks and cubbies make large spaces feel smaller.

“People like to peer out from a cozy nook into a big space full of other cozy nooks,” he observes.

His firm achieves this apparent contradiction with partial partitions, booths and banquettes, low ceilings, pendant lighting, plants and artwork that scale down a dining room without dividing it.

A matter of perspective

A raging debate about the virtue of smaller schools has drawn architects into the fray along with educators and communities.

“There are good reasons to promote smaller schools,” reports Steve Turckes, AIA, national K-12 education

market leader for Perkins & Will, based in its Chicago office. “Yet larger schools can afford to offer students more courses and specialized facilities.”

A small school recently designed by Perkins & Will, a firm much honored for educational design, has minimal



special amenities and stretches resources by wrapping classrooms around multi-functional areas. For a larger school, the firm successfully houses grade levels in interconnecting wings, and outfits them with special instructional areas of varying sizes and configurations.

Can small things have a big impact on modern life? If anything, the future of microelectronics, genetic engineering, nanotechnology and small spaces looks enormous.

Steelcase Solutions Make More of Less

“Our customers are struggling with higher real estate costs, so they're looking for ways to reduce the amount of gross square footage allotted to each person,” says Cheri Bromberg, a Steelcase application design specialist.

For most customers, says Bromberg, reducing space means compressing the “footprint” of individual spaces.

“Ten years ago, the typical workstation was 8' x 8'. Today, as real estate costs rise and workstations compress, many customers are moving to 7' x 7' or 6' x 8' workstation sizes,” she notes.

Call-center workstations tend to be significantly smaller, because they are usually completely paperless with no need for files.

“The smallest space I ever created was a call center where the workstation

footprint was 66" by 48". It consisted of a 24" x 48" worksurface and travel space for a chair. With flat-screen computers, you don't need a large corner or a deep work-surface," notes Bromberg.

Whenever the space for a workstation is reduced, it's wise to provide for needs in other ways, says Bromberg.

"If there isn't room for a guest chair in individual workstations but meeting with others is part of the job, you should provide a variety of enclaves nearby. If there isn't room for a lot of filing space inside the workstation, you need to provide archival files nearby.

"There has to be give and take, a balance between space devoted to individual workstations and the group spaces. That balance is different for each company, depending on the business goals and how they want their people to work. There has to be the right balance if people are going to be able to work effectively in the space."



Space -Saving Tips:

Make maximum use of space with shelves, overhangs and towers, nesting pedestals and tables.

More with less.

Three people can work comfortably in a 10' x 10' space with a trio of 120° workstations.

Going up?

If your real estate is limited, make good use of vertical space with towers, overhead bins, shelves and hanging pencil cups, paper clip trays, etc.

A side table extends your work area and helps keep your main worksurface free of clutter.

Two-for-one:

A mobile pedestal can double as a visitor seat with the addition of a seat cushion.