



STILL LONELY

AT THE TOP?

BY ROGER YEE

If you want to know what makes executives tick, take a close look inside their offices.

What does a senior executive's office provide its occupant? Where is it located? How is it designed? Architects and interior designers serving many of the nation's most prestigious businesses and institutions have responded to these questions with provocative answers that confirm both the endurance of tradition and the restless search for better ways to work.

Regardless of size, shape or furnishings, an executive's office generally accommodates autonomous work, formal meetings and informal discussions. Consequently, the classic three-part format endures.

"You will find a personal task area, conference area and soft seating area in almost every CEO's office," observes William Bouchey, design director of Mancini-Duffy, a noted New York-based architecture firm. "The office may come with a private pantry, private toilet and

Designers say that there will always be monumental offices for certain CEOs, but most will range between 250 and 450 square feet.

A CEO represents the pinnacle of a hierarchical organization, no matter how egalitarian he or she is. Still, Juliette Lam, a senior principal of Hellmuth, Obata & Kassabaum, the nation's largest architecture firm, believes businesses deserve credit for lowering the barriers between clerical, professional and managerial employees.

"There are still plenty of stodgy industries," she concedes, "but many are striv-

WHERE SHOULD THE BOSS SIT?

adjacent private conference room, but these options depend on the company."

Which specific functions are incorporated rely on such factors as the occupant's preference, the layout of the headquarters and the company's policy on access to its CEO. A broad-based drive to make CEOs more visible has lost momentum recently.

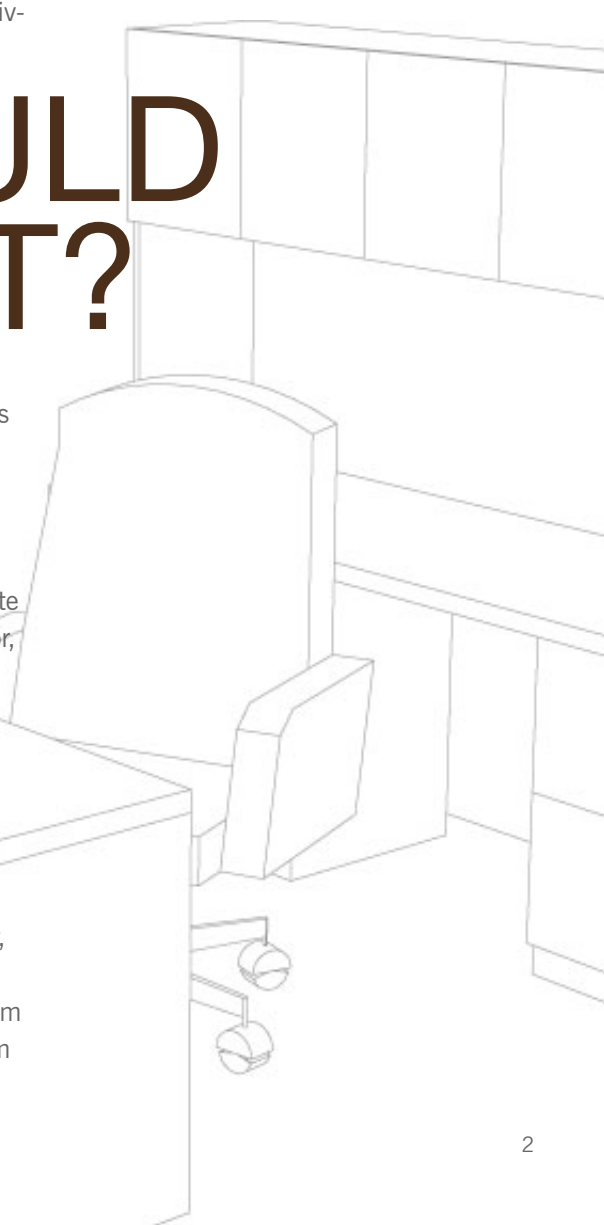
"The tragedy of 9/11 and the Iraqi War have reestablished a wall of security around many CEOs," notes Dina Frank, president of Mancini-Duffy. "It's not an issue of ego or status."

Simultaneously, floor area has declined as businesses cut real estate expenses.

ing to be more progressive. More clients also care about the quality of design, and expect it to work for them."

Forward-thinking companies in places like Silicon Valley don't hesitate to locate the CEO's office on a general office floor, typically along a window wall if not a corner, which often becomes a conference room.

"People can always tell the difference between the CEO's office and everyone else's," asserts Nila Leiserowitz, AIA, a principal and design director of Gensler, the nation's largest interior design firm and American Institute of Architects Firm of the Year. "It's just that the symbolism is no longer so obvious."



On the other hand, shouldn't a CEO who wants top aides nearby have a traditional executive floor?

"The executive suite evolved along with the modern organization," explains Phillip Deneau, vice president and design director of Griswold, Heckel & Kelly, a respected architecture firm with offices in the Midwest and Northeast.

"It still makes sense for many clients." Deneau indicates that although an executive floor in the middle of a stack of floors "sends a message to the staff," the top floor is still preferred for image and security.

As for the design and furnishing of the CEO's office, the occupant must weigh personal preferences against the expectations of colleagues and visitors.

"You ask a CEO, 'What makes you feel comfortable?'" Deneau continues. "The answer often transcends the individual's own tastes. A lot of organizations like their CEOs to be seen as VIPs. As a result, many CEOs want period-style furnishings in museum-quality reproductions."

In contrast, at Steelcase Inc.'s World Headquarters in Grand Rapids, Michigan, executives work in a casual, interactive setting first put in place almost a decade ago. James P. Hackett, president and CEO, says the space allows his team to better anticipate and adapt to changing business conditions.

"Teams that work closely together can take advantage of spontaneity and serendipity to capitalize on change," he notes.

Steelcase executives say the having collaborative space has helped them leverage their interdependence, unclog their calendars and speed up their decision-making. It also provides them with easy access to a variety of worksettings for different activities (including enclaves for private conversations, several rooms for small meetings, and a café area for socializing and impromptu discussions).

In addition, the non-traditional executive space provides a living laboratory where Steelcase researchers are continuing to experiment with various approaches for balancing privacy and collaboration in the workplace.

PRIVATE? OR COLLABORATIVE?



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Change may be in the air--literally.

The building housing the Boeing 737/757 Programs for Boeing Commercial Airplanes in Renton, Washington, has been designed by NBBJ, a prominent architecture firm serving clients nationwide, as an innovative project combining administration and manufacturing. Executives work in a "leadership area" that is part of an open-plan office above the assembly line. None of 2,500 employees has a private office, including the top executive, Carolyn Corvi, vice president and general manager of 737/757 Programs. (Her workstation is relatively large at 150 square feet.) Whereas the view from the office area surveys the assembly line, the best views are from the employee lounge overlooking the facility's food services and a nearby lake.

"The project's goals are to increase management's accessibility to staff, give engineers direct exposure to what they're creating, and promote lean manufacturing," says Anne Cunningham, a principal of NBBJ. "Boeing is tracking it as a potential way to work better."

Adds Lori Walker, another principal of NBBJ, "It sends a message to employees that good work can happen anywhere, and even CEOs don't need the old trappings to do a CEO's job."

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