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GIVING VOICE TO THOSE WHO CREATE WORKPLACE DESIGN & FURNISHINGS

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The entrance to a marketing suite designed by Eastlake Studio. Photography © Kendall McCaugherty, Hall + Merrick Photographers, courtesy of Eastlake Studio.

Eastlake Studio's Bright Spots



The large suite is filled with light.

Chicago-based firm Eastlake Studio recently completed a pair of marketing suites as a speculative workplace concept. The suites are housed in a building located at 175 West Jackson Boulevard, also in Chicago, which has a number of finance firms as tenants. Eastlake Studio was tapped to create fresh, airy spaces that would appeal to new occupants.

The owner of the building, Brookfield Properties, and the leasing agent, the Telos Group, were willing to take a chance on a design not typically found at the property. "They wanted something that was a little bit more playful and geared toward attracting a different variety of tenants, but still not so far out there that they wouldn't be able to bring in traditional companies as well. They wanted it to have a younger, vibrant feel to it," said Marissa Temple, interior designer at Eastlake Studio.

Although there has been a halt to leasing offices because of the pandemic, the objective was to create interiors suitable for post-pandemic work, but that still

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The bar can be used by employees for coffee breaks.

had maximum style. “The hope is that once people start looking at office space again, this will appeal to a broad audience. It has a lot of design impact and it is move-in



The curves of the furniture mimic those found in nature.

ready,” said Christina Brown, principal at Eastlake Studio.

The designers wanted to bring nature into the spaces but in a playful, contemporary way. The larger suite was designed to evoke a countryside retreat, with warm wood and pebbled surfaces. In the smaller suite, geode patterning abounds, with several quarry-inspired lounge areas. The result is a perfect balance between the two. They complement each other, yet are still distinct in look and feel. “Because we have two different suites, we want them to feel very different. The leasing team is going to be walking prospective tenants through multiple spaces, so they have to be unique. We want them to hit home for different people in different ways,” noted Brown.

Achieving the desired effect was not easy, and this project came with a special set of complications because they were working when the pandemic landed stateside. Everybody had to adjust quickly, from embracing Zoom calls, to changing orders and reconsidering furniture layouts. “We were about a week into the design development when the pandemic hit. We had just started selecting the materials, and we had to figure out how to work remotely,” Brown explained.



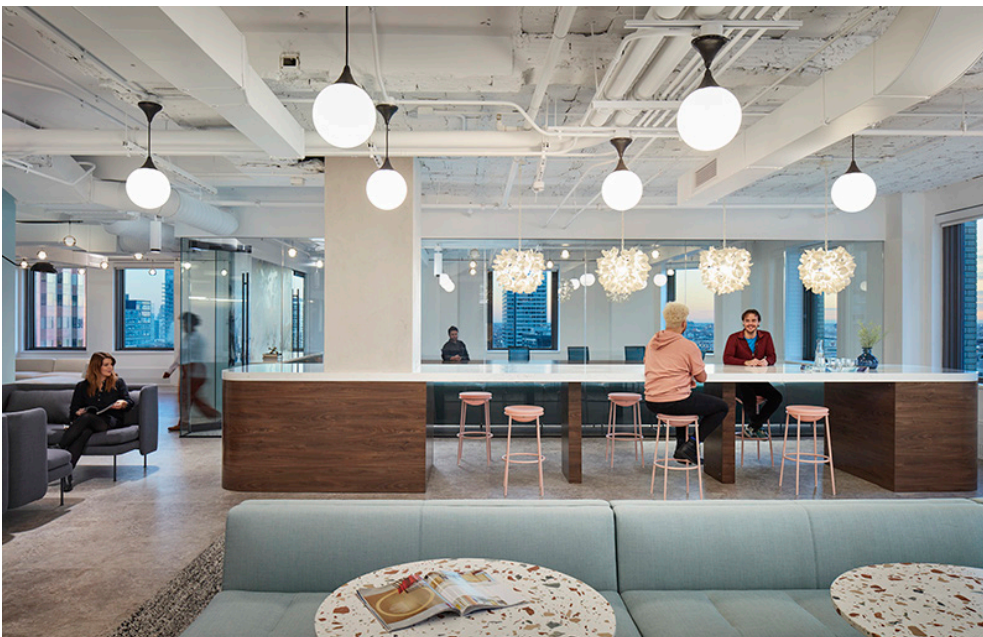
The custom partition in the large suite holds 450 test tubes filled with dried flowers.

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Floral colors and patterns enliven the large suite.



A range of fixtures in the large suite provide illumination.

Eastlake Studio decided to adopt a more-is-more approach to make sure they had everything they needed, from fabrics to tile. “We decided on a huge palette with a ton of extra materials that we could pare down as needed. We knew that all of these things coordinated well, so that also gave us flexibility. If we wanted to change something, we could go another route much more easily,” Temple noted.

Bringing enough illumination into the suites was a primary concern, and the architects used certain fixtures and strategies to create rooms that were well lit, but not too harshly. “There are a lot of really dark and challenging parts of the floor because of the building itself. It was important that we contrast that with some

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The pebbled tile brings a touch of nature indoors.

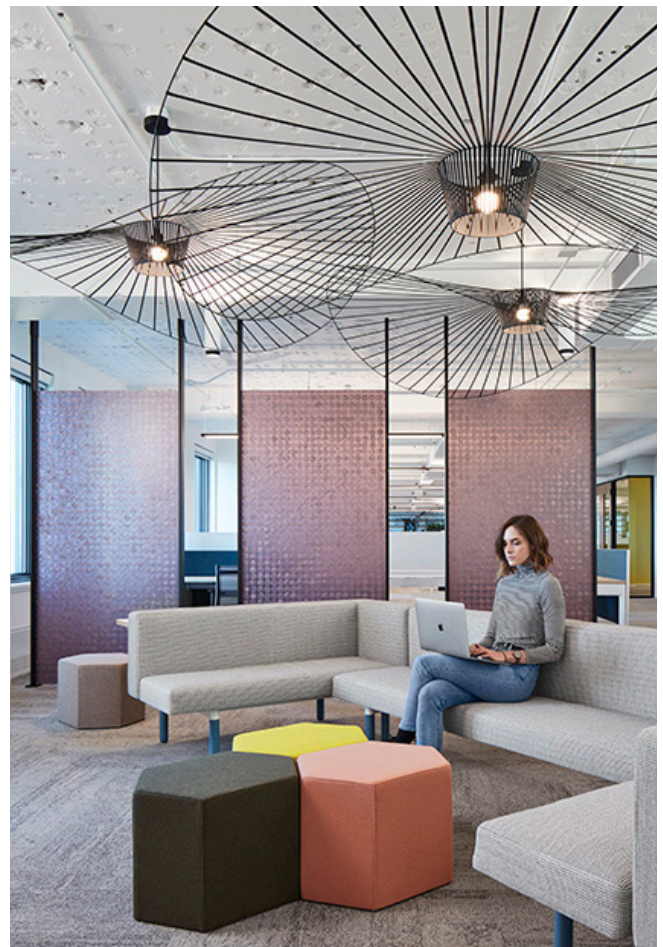
brightness. Many of the design elements are really centered around that goal,” Brown said.

Temple was excited to create a new look that was the opposite of the darkened hospitality-style rooms that have been so popular in recent years. “I think that the trend has been, prior to COVID-19, to have these dark and moody spaces. We wanted to do something completely different, so we challenged ourselves to bring in fresher, biophilic elements. We definitely knew that we wanted to do some type of divider that would allow the light to come through it,” she explained.

Temple kept referring back to a specific image on one of their original mood boards, an image of glass test tubes, and the idea for a stunning partition began to take shape. Eastlake Studio called upon fabrication company AllKinds, also located in the Windy City, to help bring the concept to fruition. They procured and put together 450 vials, which were then filled with dried flowers. More than a basic space divider, it is the Instagram-worthy centerpiece of the large suite.



The kitchen area in the large suite features pops of yellow color.



The light fixtures have organic shapes that seem to float in the space.



A fresh chartreuse color on the ceiling gives the space added vibrancy.

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The colors are sophisticated, organic hues that reflect the themes of the spaces and bring an added richness to every corner. Yellow and green are central in the large space, while rust and teal tints enliven the smaller suite. “We used colors found in nature and that tied back to those botanicals that we used in the feature wall,” Temple said.

Furniture and how it would be configured changed significantly because of concerns about distancing, and how seating requirements would change post-COVID. “We re-evaluated the furniture and the layout, knowing that concerns about privacy, acoustics, and just cleanliness in general had to be addressed. Typically in these types of marketing suites, the workstations are more generic and usually in a benching layout. Now, people don’t want that

closeness, so we did a lot of planning around that. We tried to figure out what

the next wave of clients and tenants would want to see,” Brown noted.



Workstations or lounge chairs are just some of the seating options available.



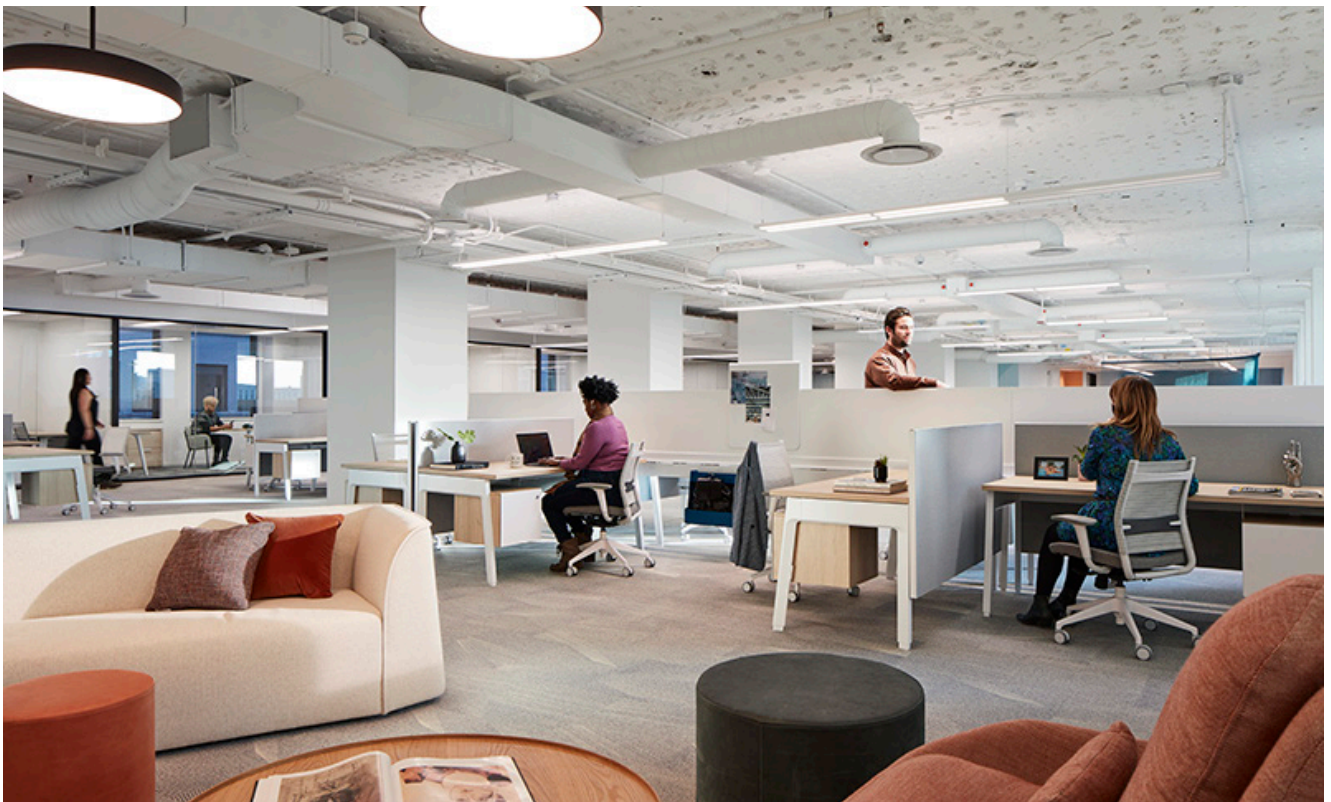
The reception area in the small suite features geode patterning.

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A variety of chairs are available in both suites.



The flexible workstations can be easily moved.

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The string partition lets in just enough light while still separating the work area.



The string partition is an innovative design element for the office.

The workstations are currently positioned six feet apart, but they can be easily moved to best meet the needs of employees. There are plenty of other comfortable seating options for when people want to take a break or collaborate in smaller groups. “The sofas and the backs of the chairs have this softness, and organic curves. We rounded a lot of the corners, too. The lounge furniture melded well with all of the other decorative elements,” Temple said.

Brown agreed, and noted that the furnishings were another thoughtful way that they were able to bring the

outside world indoors. “Molded wood and leather, or a stitching detail on the furniture, they just speak to a different kind of nature. We used them like plants normally would be,” she added.

These suites give us a glimpse of what the next workspaces may look like, not too staid yet not too showy either. “I don’t think we’re going to want the office to feel exactly like home again, because that’s where we are now. We want it to feel different when we go to work, we want and need that transition. I think it will be a blend of where we were and something new,” Brown said. ■