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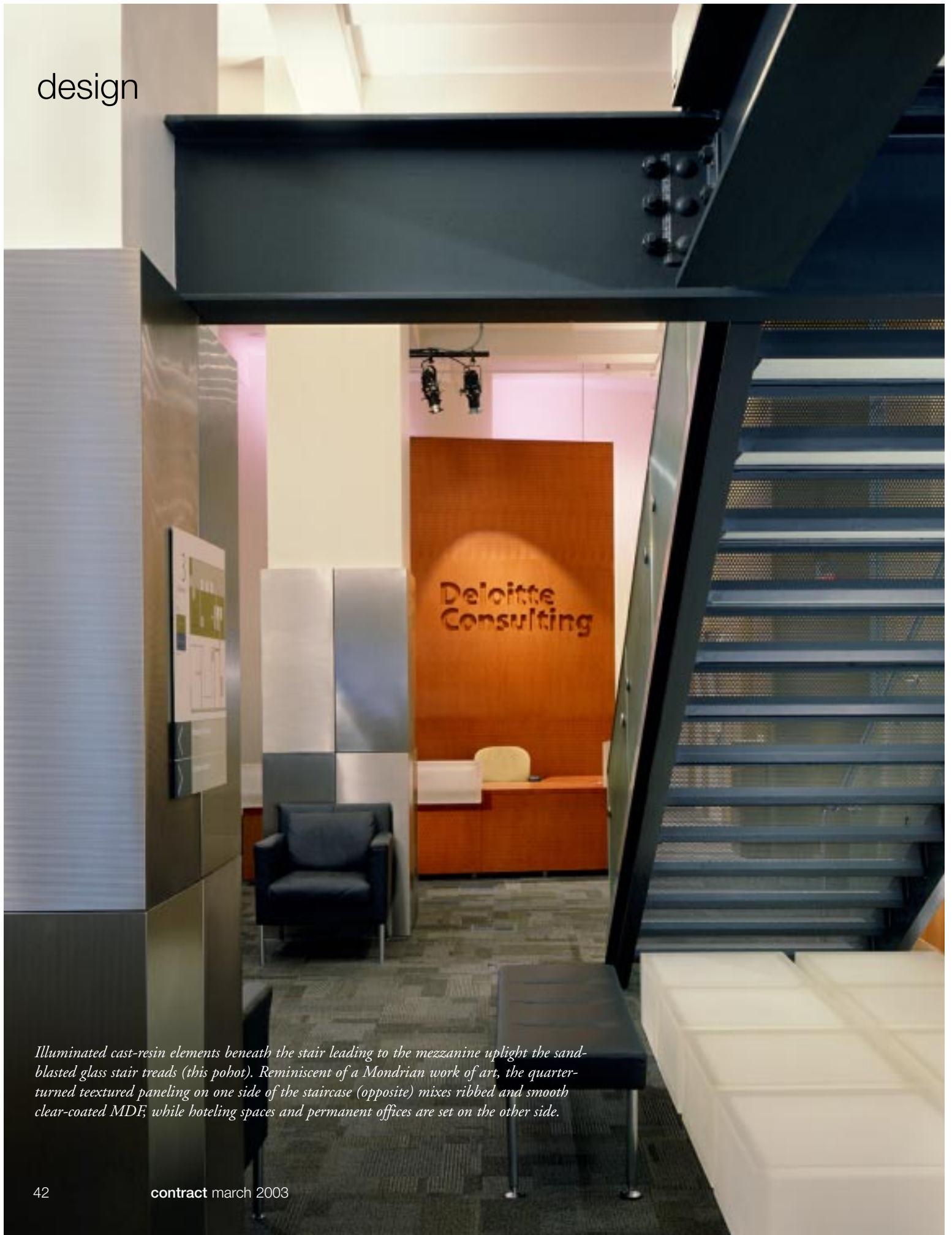


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design



Illuminated cast-resin elements beneath the stair leading to the mezzanine uplight the sandblasted glass stair treads (this photo). Reminiscent of a Mondrian work of art, the quarter-turned textured paneling on one side of the staircase (opposite) mixes ribbed and smooth clear-coated MDF, while hoteling spaces and permanent offices are set on the other side.

Downtown Loft

Suben/Dougherty Partnership raises the bar—and the floor—to create a cultured loft space for Deloitte Consulting in lower Manhattan

By Jean Nayar



Given its culture and the nature of its business, it should come as no surprise that the new eastern regional offices of Deloitte Consulting (soon to be Braxton) reflect state-of-the-art design concepts. As one of the country's leading business consultants, the company's employees are keenly aware of the myriad ways to improve efficiency, productivity, and the bottom line, including alternative office space-planning techniques. In fact, the firm's new offices in lower Manhattan not only embody cost-saving, efficiency-improving space systems, but aspects of their infrastructure, layout, and furniture systems—designed by the Suben/Dougherty Partnership — break new ground as well.

Deloitte Consulting began the search for new office space during “the throws of the dot-com mania,” says architect Susan Dougherty, a principal of Suben/Dougherty, adding that finding appropriate New York real estate in spring of 2000 wasn't easy. At the time, Deloitte Consulting was sharing space with its accounting arm Deloitte & Touche in the World Financial Center. But because its practice was growing and space was getting tight, the consultancy made a decision to find separate office space and consolidate its New York, Connecticut, and New Jersey consultancies under one roof. Before the tragic events of 9/11 forced the firm to move from the World Financial Center and before the SEC mandated that accounting firms separate their consulting and accounting practices, Deloitte Consulting signed a lease for the third, 14th, and 15th floors of the landmark Cunard building on Broadway in lower Manhattan, and began construction in June 2001.

According to Arthur Rubenstein, a project manager with Deloitte Consulting's real estate services group, the commitment to lease space in the Cunard building “was driven by the firm's desire to have open and more loft-like space, which was really only available in some of the older buildings downtown.” Another appeal of the building, he says, was that it was more economically feasible for a longer-term lease. “Rental rates were so dramatically different in Class A midtown buildings constructed in the '80s and '90s than they were in older buildings downtown that, even though there were space-utilization challenges in the Cunard building, it was still a much better economic deal.”



Sliding clear and textured glass walls permit light from perimeter workstations to penetrate the 9-ft. by 12-ft. partners' offices at the core (above left). A suspended, metal mesh ceiling gives the executive conference room (above right) a finished look without detracting from the loft-like atmosphere. Green – and plum-toned panels mask the open plan workstations and enliven the long “Main Street” (opposite).



Oddly enough, the limitations of the 82-year-old building served as the starting points for some of the architect's more innovative design solutions. “The space has large columns, scattered cores, and an irregular shape, all of which contribute to a loss of usable space;” says Rubenstein. “The 127,000 rentable sq. ft. of this space was designed to ultimately accommodate more than 1,000 people. However, the usable square footage here is only about 95,000 sq. ft – or less than 100 sq. ft. per person – which is very aggressive. But we're champions of better leveraging the utilization of space, and some of our best planning ideas were born out of the fact that we were dealing with a difficult building.”

Indeed, one of the new offices' most remarkable features – an under-the-floor infrastructure – emerged as a result of a conflict between the standard services available in the Cunard building and the way in which Deloitte does business. “Ours is not a nine-to-five culture;” says Deloitte Consulting's tri-state operations manager, Christine Mallek. “People in our office can work round-the-clock and, in some cases, seven days a week.” Although placing infrastructure systems for heating and cooling beneath raised floors is fairly common in Europe, no such solution had ever been employed in an old building in Manhattan, according to Dougherty. “The great value of the underfloor HVAC system is its flexibility;” she explains. “The underfloor is a ductless pressurized plenum, which allows supply grilles to be popped out and relocated at will to redirect, increase or decrease air flow.” And to keep the space from being prey to the landlord's control so that people could comfortably work after normal working hours, the architects built an entire chiller plant on the third floor to provide a stand-alone HVAC infrastructure.





Project Summary



Deloitte's business approach also played heavily in the types of workspaces the architects designed and how they were configured. "Because we are a consulting firm, most of our people spend 60 to 70 percent of their time out of the office," says Mallek. "We're a high-energy group that's very technologically oriented, and we needed to come up with a high-performance, extremely functional, very efficient, and flexible space." Taking advantage of the building's inherent attributes – architectural character, tall windows, and high ceilings, especially those of the double-height third floor – the architects developed a flexible, efficient, and sophisticated mix of multipurpose teaming spaces, glass-enclosed offices, reconfigurable workstations, and hoteling zones.

To make the most of usable square footage, the architects devised teaming hubs between clusters of four workstations in spaces that might otherwise have been lost as circulation zones. Here, when employees need to work in groups they can slide open the whiteboard walls of their cubicles, wheel out their desks, link into centralized plug-and-play data and phone connection ports, and use the whiteboard doors to map out strategies with dry markers. To capture an additional 7,000 sq. ft., the architects also added a mezzanine on the third floor, which overlooks a multipurpose casual meeting space and coffee bar area below. Defined by a mix of industrial and refined materials, a subtle palette, and Mondrianesque textures, Deloitte's new offices exude what Dougherty refers to as a "cultured loft" atmosphere, which aptly complements the company's progressive culture and business model. **C**

The 18-ft.-high multipurpose space (above) features informal seating, drop-in phone banks, a coffee bar, and arched windows that overlook the lobby below.

Who

Project, client: Braxton (formerly Deloitte Consulting). **Architect, interior designer:** Suben/Dougherty Partnership; Susan Dougherty, partner; Richard Veith, project manager; Scott Huether, project architect; Alexis Dennis, Eric Green, designers; Marialaina Famiglietti, production. **Structural engineer:** Rabco. **Mechanical, electrical engineer:** Edwards & Zuck. **General contractor:** OD&P. **Lighting designer:** Horton Lees Brogden Lighting Group. **Acoustician:** ProCom Systems. **Furniture dealer:** AFD. **Graphics/signage:** Poulin & Morris. **Photographer:** Jonathan Wallen.

What

Wallcoverings: KnollTextiles. **Paint:** Benjamin Moore. **Laminate:** Formica. **Carpet/carpet tile:** Interface. **Ceiling:** USG. **Lighting:** Lightolier, Luceplan, Rambusch, SA Lighting. **Doors, window frames, wail systems:** Wilson Partitions. **Glass:** McGrory. **Window treatments:** Mecho-Shade. **Railings:** Custom. **Workstations/seating, files:** Steelcase. **Lounge seating:** Brayton, Metro. **Cafeteria, dining, auditorium seating:** Davis. **Upholstery:** The Designtex Group, Unika Vaev, KnollTextiles. **Conference table:** Nucraft custom. **Cafeteria, dining, training tables:** Vecta, Steelcase. **Architectural woodworking:** Patella Woodworking. **Cabinetmaking:** Metro. **Signage:** custom. **Access flooring:** Tate. **Plumbing fixtures:** Kohler, Dornbracht.

Where

Location: New York, NY. **Total floor area:** 130,000 sq. ft. **No. of floors:** Three. **Average floor size:** 43,444 sq. ft. **Total staff size:** 500.