Tear Down These Walls

A growing San Francisco architecture firm maintains its everyone-counts culture by designing an open office space

As its team jumped from four people to 15 over five years, Feldman Architecture needed a greater office space to suit its growing ranks. But at a company full of creative architecture professionals, principal Jonathan Feldman says it felt like the project had 12 clients and 12 designers to please. “We had designed our previous office but we had few options then as the space was much smaller,” Feldman says. With more than double the amount of space to work with in the new office, located in the circa-1890 Abbott Building in Telegraph Hill, Feldman had plenty of options. But one thing everyone agreed was a must-have was an open, communal feel with lots of natural light.

“Our new space previously had been divided into private offices and conference rooms near the windows, with cubicles in the center and to the back of the office that were dark,” Feldman says. To create some breathing room and give light from the north-facing wall of windows a way to travel, they made the decision to tear down almost all of the walls in the space. In the end, only the server room and a supply room were walled off. The team also pulled up the carpeting to highlight the concrete.

(continued...)
Clune Construction Company is proud to have collaborated with Goettsch Partners on the successful Baker & McKenzie project.

CONTINUED: floors and large structural columns of the vintage building.

In the conference room, they created custom translucent glass and metal sliding doors so light could flow through whether they were open or closed. The rest of the room was clad with wood paneling that's black on the outside and white on the inside, an unexpected detail that is one of Feldman's favorites. Hidden tracks between the panels allow custom shelves to move for displaying art or pinup boards as needed. The warm and honey custom-made wood table at the center of the room nods to Feldman Architecture's real specialty—residential design—as does the spacious kitchen where four or five people can make lunch at one time. "We hope this openness conveys the sense that we are all a vital part of the organization," says Feldman. "Everyone has a voice and a presence."

The "important aspect of the design was that we could use it flexibly to show prospective clients how we worked," Feldman says. "The glass wall in the hallway demonstrates the importance of placing an alternative to glass to work, and also displays a beautiful set of keys that changes daily."