Natural Structures + Refined Residential: A Tech Investment Firm in San Francisco’s Presidio

by Mallory Jindra

On the northern tip of the San Francisco Peninsula is the Presidio, a California dreaming national park of lush landscapes, gorgeous views and historic buildings that architectural and design firms continue to reinvigorate, project by project. The 1,500 acre park is a major outdoor recreation hub, but it also includes a lively restaurant, art and history scene (it’s also a former U.S. Army military fort) accompanied by historic residences and businesses including Lucasfilm.

Within the Presidio, a technology investment firm had outgrown its current office, and selected its new space in an adjacent building for its similar location and larger scale. Feldman Architecture, a firm with residential roots, won the project because of a residential home it had designed for one of the tech investment firm partners. The firm’s leaders were intent on bringing the same light-filled, refined residential palette of the partner’s home to its new offices.
Historic buildings within the Presidio are known to have fixed structural elements imposing a repetitive infrastructure that cannot be altered. In their client’s new 11,791 square foot space, Feldman Architecture set about designing an office around two key structural elements: the building’s existing skylights and a series of concrete columns that were haphazardly placed throughout the space. Everything within the space, from layout down to the smallest aesthetic details, is a reaction to these key structural elements.

“These fixed elements acted as a source of inspiration for the design,” reads the project description. “The rhythm of the exposed columns organizes a progression through the office and serves various programmatic needs of the employees and guests.”

“The building had these amazing skylights that had previously been cut off from the space below,” noted Jonathan Feldman, founding partner and director of Feldman Architecture, in an officeinsight interview. “The first thing we did was reveal those skylights in order to design around them.”
Feldman Architecture worked tirelessly to infuse a refined aesthetic stemming from its residential expertise. “Our curating a super tight palette was one of the best things we did – laboring over the exact tones, the stain of the wood, the color of the whites,” said Mr. Feldman. “And then letting the natural light do its thing. It’s a very restrained, thoughtful exercise, but in the end it gives the space a lot of freedom and natural warmth.”

To execute certain pieces of the project, Feldman Architecture brought in its own metal work and carpentry partners.

The library, at the heart of the office, features an angled ceiling leading up to an expansive ridge skylight that supports a warm, welcoming aesthetic.
Arriving from the elevator lobby, employees and guests alike step through a continuous wood-clad wall with a pivoting door to a warm, light-filled reception featuring double-height ceilings and a living wall. The workplace beyond is “We wanted to give the private offices a very tailored, residential feel, so we brought in our own craftspeople to design them to fit like a glove,” said Mr. Feldman. “And they do. We used the same wood floorboards I used in my house, applying them vertically to create the wood accent walls. It has that residential influence, but it’s subtle in its design.”
Airy lighting cushion a double height ceiling.

Hallway

Wood clad wall and pivoting door

Airy lighting cushion a double height ceiling.
Two wood-clad compression corridors branch off from the reception area and lead to private offices as well as large, double-height public spaces, including an open office and a library. The library, at the heart of the office, features an angled ceiling leading up to an expansive ridge skylight that supports a warm, welcoming aesthetic.

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Mr. Feldman noted the palette of wood and painted white steel, chosen as a way to embrace the textures and colors that were already present in the space. Feldman let the office’s steel tiled floors act as a dominant material in the design.

“The acoustics of the floor were terrible, so we had to make up for that elsewhere.”

“We had done just one or two offices before, and the biggest difference for us was the pace,” said Mr. Feldman. “Office work is a sprint, and this client was particularly aggressive scheduling. They needed more space as soon as possible in order to allow their business to grow unhindered.”

Since Feldman Architecture’s completion of this project, the firm has added several new office projects to its portfolio – a signal that residential’s influence on the contract market is continuing to shift the manner in which new work is being acquired and the ways firms are exploring new markets.