

## TOP 10 DESIGN FEATURES OF IN-HOUSE "THIRD PLACES"

**1. Cell phone friendliness.** Everyone does something on a cell phone, whether it be talking, texting, or using the Internet. In "third places," the cell phone supersedes all other mobile devices.

**2. Light and bright and plants.** Every place had at least one wall of windows. Most set up tables along the windows on both sides. An atmosphere of airiness and greenery gives a relaxed calm feel and a convivial atmosphere.

**3. Good food.** Alterra won over Starbucks in this department hands-down. To take a clue for what this means for an in-house "third place," provide good coffee and good food on site.

**4. A water station.** All my stops (with the exception of Pfister which served water at every table) had a water station set up for clientele to get their own water at any time.

**5. An unofficially designated place for smokers.** Smokers were a presence outside most of the coffee shops. Impossible to design for in today's smoke-free buildings, but business owners should think of offering employees a quick exit to an outdoor smoking zone. It's thought that no one smokes anymore—not true.

# Design clues for in-house "third place"

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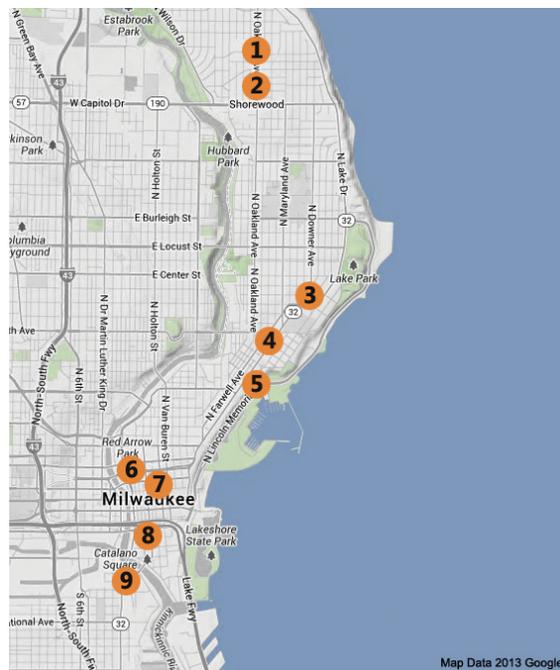
I went on a two-day tour of select Milwaukee Central Business District and Eastside coffee houses in order to figure out what elements translate to designing in-house "third places". (It's a tough job but somebody's got to do it.) These thumb-nail sketches of the nine coffee shops observed focus on key features of "third places". This completely non-scientific bit of "anthropologic fieldwork" follows:

### 1. Alterra Coffee 4500 N. Oakland Ave.

I got my iced chai and sat down at a center table, figuring it to be a good vantage point. Of the nine people around me, working, six had laptops, including one nine year old boy. (The others were in their late 20s and early 30s.) All had coffee and water; one also had a sandwich on the table. Of the two who didn't have laptops, one was writing longhand, and the other was reading an actual book!

I moved outside to try to capture the scene there. Nine people around me: two men, early 20s, each working on a laptop across from the other; one woman, early 30s, writing longhand in a spiral notebook; another young woman, mid 20s, talking on a cell phone; two young woman, early 20s, talking to each other; a group of four older (50s) people eating sandwiches and talking. Other than these four, everyone outside had only coffee and water.

The barista said the clientele were neighborhood people, whether that be mothers and children (common), college and high school students, or people who worked from home.



"Third Places" observed:

- 1 Alterra Coffee, N. Oakland Ave.
- 2 Stone Creek Coffee, N. Oakland Ave.
- 3 Starbucks, N. Downer Ave.
- 4 Alterra Coffee Roasters, N. Prospect Ave
- 5 Alterra At the Lake, Lincoln Memorial Dr.
- 6 Starbucks, N. Water St
- 7 The Pfister Hotel Café, E. Wisconsin Ave.
- 8 Hudson Business Lounge, E. Buffalo St.
- 9 Alterra Coffee, S. 1st St.



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#### 6. A great bathroom.

Restroom facilities are extremely important. They should feel spacious (even if they aren't physically big), clean and be odor free. They also need to have a shelf and a hook. In-house "third places" need to be located near the restrooms.

#### 7. Quiet and not-quiet spaces.

"Third spaces" need to indicate the quiet and not-quiet areas in some way, whether by physical barriers, or plants, or simply décor that signals "quiet."

#### 8. Open to anyone in the firm or company.

A "third place" only works if it's open to everyone. If it's like the VIP Lounge or Club Room, it's not a "third place."

#### 9. Located on a hub.

A "third place" needs to be centrally located and easy to get to.

**10. A hip space.** Need I say more? Cool is always cool.

These are elements of "third places" that the two-day tour suggested. What signals a good in-house "third place" to you? Please share your thoughts by emailing us at:

home@chemistryinplace.net

### 2. Stone Creek Coffee 4106 N. Oakland Ave.

I took in this smaller coffee shop at a glance:

M, 50s, laptop in case, writing with pen on paper, coffee and water

F, 30s, working on laptop, coffee and water

F, 30s, working on laptop with Bluetooth, coffee

F, 50s, working on laptop, coffee and water

3 Fs, 20s, talking with no mobile devices in sight, coffee

M, 30s, working on laptop, coffee



*Q: How do coffee shops make any money, with so many customers buying one cup of coffee and occupying a table for hours?*

The barista said the clientele depended upon the time of day. In the morning and during the day there are the local businesspeople—attorneys, small business owners—and then at night it's a preponderance of students (UWM, Shorewood High School, Atwater Middle School).

### 3. Starbucks 2551 N. Downer Ave.

The barista at this coffee shop said the clientele was a mix of students, businesspeople and neighborhood

residents and that's exactly what I saw—almost all with laptops and cell phones. Three people were without cell phones in view, one was possibly a homeless man, and the other two were mother and daughter. Even the young mother walking by with a toddler on her hip was checking texts.

All had coffee drinks, mostly the fancy kind with straws (whereas in other coffee shops it was mostly black coffee.) Several people were smoking in the outside area and then went inside to order their drinks.

*Q: Do people really still smoke?*

Funny thing: Everyone was with someone—boyfriend or girlfriend, a group of friends, with an acquaintance. Only one person other than me was sitting alone and he was the one I thought might be homeless.

### 4. Alterra Coffee Roasters 2211 N. Prospect Ave.

The barista said that in the early morning they got lots of business people but after that it was mainly students. (UWM is a couple blocks away.) The majority wore student attire. Most everyone had a laptop and a cell phone. One student wore noise blocking headphones, otherwise no head gear. All ages, 18 to 70.

Everyone had their coffee, but also sandwiches, salads and quiche. Much more food than at Starbucks. (*because it was near lunchtime?*) About half had brought their own sandwich or yogurt and were eating it with Alterra's coffee.

Several people were talking loudly, both on cell phones and to others and the people nearby cast irritated looks. This made me think that The Buzz Booths shown at NeoCon would have come in handy.

### 5. Alterra At the Lake 1701 N. Lincoln Memorial Dr.

The mother of all Alterras sprawls along the lake. This Alterra is always so packed with people, that it's hard to tally who's doing

what. The barista helped me out, saying that because of the location, they get a large variety of clientele. A lot of Eastsiders, but also a fair amount of businesspeople, especially during the week. The generation span is wide, with the notable exception of no children—I'd guess because the residents of the palatial homes nearby don't have small children.

While I was waiting for my Green Hornet smoothie, I looked around inside. Not counting the army of high schoolers talking on cell phones, there were four occupied tables. All had black coffee or iced tea and either laptops or netbooks.



Outside, there were 12 occupied tables. All had drinks—lemonade, coffee, or iced coffee drinks—and one also had quiche of the day. No mobile devices outside, other than the ubiquitous cell phone. There was one table of two elderly ladies talking animatedly, two tables of men, otherwise, the rest were women, ranging from 20s through 50s. Interesting that they were mostly women.

#### **6. Starbucks 920 N. Water St.**

Surrounded by government and business offices, this Starbucks occupies a prime location. The barista

on duty confirmed this and said attorneys and office workers frequent the place. Most people come in, get their vente coffees and leave, using the coffee run as a daily ritual.

A man and woman in business dress were seated at the main table, obviously holding a meeting; however, neither were using mobile devices, just talking intensely face-to-face. A man came in, went to a table, opened his laptop, and talked on the phone, standing all the while.

Two men clearly dressed for business came in and got their tall coffees, then stood outside the door smoking. When their cigarettes were finished, they took their coffees and left.

#### **7. The Pfister Hotel Café, 424 E. Wisconsin Ave.**

Of course I had to go to the Pfister for lunch—their salmon salad is to die for. Clearly, this is where the movers and shakers meet. As I was being led to a table by the window, I must have passed 15 business lunches going on. No coffee shop fare here.

With the nice lunches comes the absence of mobile devices. I didn't see any except one man sitting alone using an iPad and another man with a cell phone. Otherwise, it was all face-to-face business lunches with the occasional mother-daughter duo or tourists.

After the business lunch rush, the crowd redistributed and more tourists arrived; however, I note yet again a remarkable absence of mobile devices—occasional cell phone use but not much else.

#### **8. Hudson Business Lounge 310 E. Buffalo St.**

The barista said the clientele are all businesspeople. I did some counting (café section only) and confirmed this:

- 9 people with laptops
- 4 people meeting with others
- 1 man talking with Bluetooth
- 1 woman sitting in the sun, but it looked like she had a laptop in her briefcase

at her feet  
 0 people without cell phones in  
 their hands (even those talking  
 face to face)

The age range was more uniform than in the coffee shops, everyone 30-50 except for the barista who was 20ish.

Unlike at the other establishments observed, no one was drinking coffee! *Perhaps because it was getting towards dinner?* Instead there were iced teas, glasses of wine, and glasses of water along with snacks, sandwiches and hors d'oeuvres. Sure is a different end of the day crowd than at the Wicked Hop...

### 9. Alterra Coffee 170 S. 1<sup>st</sup> St.

The barista said their crowd is a mix of businesspeople, students from all three schools (UWM, MSOE and Marquette) and retired people. I sat down next to an older white male and an austere younger woman-clearly the boss-having a high-powered meeting. This duo didn't have any mobile devices on the table-the woman occasionally took longhand notes and pulled out spiral bound reports for the man to look at. They both had black briefcases at their feet. At one point, the man got some sort of signal from his cell phone in his pocket, so he took it out and looked and said something to his boss, then put it away.



I counted four other meetings, and none of them were using any mobile devices. (However, they all had their cell phones on the table next to them.) In the "non-meeting" tables there were a couple of laptops being used. There were 20 plus people in the shop and only one didn't have a cell phone on the table next to him (maybe he had one in his pocket.)

The "meeting" people had black coffees and no food. Others with food were either studying or on a social outing.