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# LEGAL MANAGEMENT

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## CREATING GEOGRAPHICALLY RELEVANT DESIGN



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## OM Feature

OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

# Creating Geographically Relevant Design

Tips for designing a workspace that works well for employees and clients

As the practice of law evolves — with changes in billing practices, legal process outsourcing, file management, globalization, corporate social responsibility, workforce composition, square footage per attorney, collaboration and individual efforts, cost of real estate, and technology — one theme remains constant: Space matters.



**PATRICIA S. ALGIERS**  
ASID and CNU-Accredited  
President  
Chemistry in Place

*“Managing a law firm is managing individual practice groups, operational procedures that support groups, and space. Consequently, to stay on top, we need to leverage space to meet the needs of our people and to address current practices.”*

Therefore, designing a space that is an aesthetic expression of location, with features that help employees do their best work and feel good at the same time, just make sense. It follows that such a space will attract and retain both talent and clients alike.

The following is an example of how one firm is tackling the challenges of making a space that works for both employees and clients. [\*Quarles & Brady LLP\*](#) has 10 offices around the United States. They aim to meld look and feel with culture, while capturing the essence of each geographic region.

“Managing a law firm is managing individual practice groups, operational procedures that support groups, and space. Consequently, to stay on top, we need to leverage space to meet the needs of our people and to address current practices,” says John J. Peterburs, PhD, Executive Director, Quarles & Brady.

But how is it done? And what steps can you take to implement some of these ideas at your company?

### **PROGRESS MEANS CHANGE**

What is the office of the future? Design firms must constantly revisit this question to create optimal layout that is current today and relevant tomorrow. An office space must not be rendered obsolete before the term of the lease expires.

“Law firm designs of the past seemed dark and closed off to me,” says David L. Wilson, Manager, Purchasing in the Milwaukee office, who’s been involved in the fit-out of all the spaces in the various areas the firm has offices. “The most positive features we’ve incorporated recently are

**JOHN J. PETERBURS**

Executive Director,  
Quarles & Brady



brighter finishes, glass and a more open design. Glass fronts or glass doors on interior and perimeter offices allow natural light to reach further into internal spaces.”



## QUARLES CHICAGO

The Chicago office capitalizes on its proximity to Lake Michigan and the Loop. The space is designed to be hospitality-minded and client-centric. It adapts to the continually changing, problem-solving nature of a legal work environment and maintains that ability to reinvent itself continually over the course of the 15-year lease.

*“Personally, what I like best is the fact that I walk around and see people smiling because of the environment. The space makes everyone so happy, and that translates into doing good work.”*

**D. LINDEN BARBER**

Managing Partner,  
Indianapolis



When all factors are in balance, the resulting environment is a positive place that attracts and retains employees and clients. “Everyone seems to have a much better attitude and general sense of well-being,” adds Wilson.

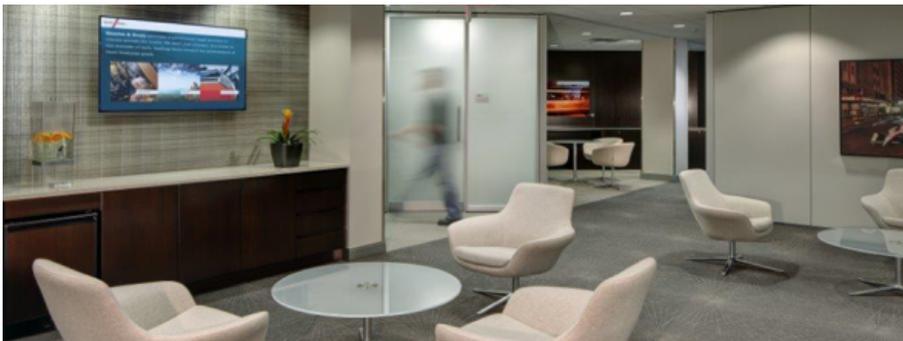
Change also means letting go of traditional law practices and designing spaces accordingly. In the past, partners chose their own office furniture. Today, the selections are made based on efficiency, ergonomics and the look and feel of the firm as a whole — further contributing to giving each space its own identity consistent with its geographically designed significance.

### CONSISTENCY ACROSS LOCATIONS

“Creating a new workplace for a firm with multiple locations is not about rote duplication,” says Fredrick G. Lautz, Managing Partner. “Instead, it is about leveraging opportunity to push traditions forward, stay ahead of trends and support attorneys, staff and clients in innovative ways.”

To deliver a consistent brand experience in each location, there are some things that are always considered, such as city dynamics, central business district location, public transportation accessibility, Class A buildings and city views.

“Whether we’re planning a new office or remodeling an existing one, [we don’t] use a cookie-cutter approach to design; every location is different in some manner,” says Wilson. “For each project, a committee (attorneys and staff) helps direct how their offices and client spaces will look and function.”



## QUARLES INDIANAPOLIS

This is the most recently completed office and is located in the heart of the Indianapolis business district. Another local tie-in? Its walls are decked out in art from students at an area design school.

*“Our remodeling efforts are intentionally focused on improving the work areas for our employees, bringing the creature comforts of home into the workplace, and creating an employee hub to enhance the relationships that we already have with one another.”*

**KATHERINE M.  
PERHACH**

*Managing Partner,  
Milwaukee*



For example, the Milwaukee office is the latest to undergo an overhaul — and the city played a major role in the design. With views of Lake Michigan and Miller Park, visitors definitely get a taste of the city just by being in the office.

“Milwaukee is a big city that feels more like a small town...[at Quarles & Brady], we’re all coworkers, but we’re also friends,” says Katherine M. Perhach, Managing Partner in the Milwaukee office. “Our remodeling efforts are intentionally focused on improving the work areas for our employees, bringing the creature comforts of home into the workplace, and creating an employee hub to enhance the relationships that we already have with one another,” says Perhach. They’re also incorporating a client service gallery in their conference room that highlights their clients and their industries.

### **APPLYING IT TO YOUR OFFICE**

Lisa Matheson, Office Administrator in the Indianapolis office, has noticed a change in the employees, too, noting that since the redesign, the feedback from staff — and clients — has been nothing but positive. “A recent visitor asked if we ever grow tired of hearing what a wonderful space we have. Our people are genuinely happy to work in this space and it shows each and every day by the smile on their face.”

Not every firm can do an overhaul on their office space — budget and staff buy-in are just a couple potential roadblocks. But even smaller firms with one location can incorporate practices that help attract and retain employees and clients, practices that Quarles & Brady have found success with.

Ask yourself the following:

- **Are there ways to incorporate wellness into your work environment?**

Companies should pride themselves on providing a healthy work environment. Set up a room where employees can de-stress or meditate. Invest in equipment that is ergonomic. For example, Quarles & Brady outfits offices with height-adjustable desks and walk stations. Peterburs notes that the height-adjustable desks in particular have been a big hit with employees. It might not fit within your budget, but research shows that finding ways to help employees mitigate stress helps with employee retention.

- **Can you make it more social and collaborative?**

The office is a place for building relationships. Therefore, aim to create a space that fosters comfort for both formal and casual meetings. Spaces for group collaboration, impromptu meetings, open communication and team building among employees all are born from the trend in collaboration over independent work. Remember, clients also share in the benefits of collaborative spaces.



## QUARLES TAMPA

The Tampa office was inspired by the surrounding beaches. The look and feel of the design mimics the bright and airy feel of the surroundings and is noted in the selection of furniture, lighting and finishes. The aesthetics and flow of the floor plan make it a connectivity hub.

*“Law firm designs of the past seemed dark and closed off to me. The most positive features we’ve incorporated recently are brighter finishes, glass and a more open design. Glass fronts or glass doors on interior and perimeter offices allow natural light to reach further into internal spaces.”*

### DAVID L. WILSON

Manager, Purchasing,  
Milwaukee



- **Can you bring in local flair to your space?**

“From the plants to the distinctive artwork, you know you’re in Phoenix, Indianapolis or even Washington, DC. But you also know you’re in a Quarles & Brady office,” says Peterburs. In Indianapolis, they have artwork from students at the Herron School of Art and Design.

- **Does technology do all it can for your company?**

The impact of new technologies in the legal landscape is evident. Electronic filing systems, electronic libraries, in-house technology and learning centers, videoconferencing centers, new email protocols, cloud computing and document sharing — can investing in even one of these solutions improve the efficiency and flexibility at your firm? For example, would storing files electronically help declutter and maybe add space for a wellness room or a comfortable seating area where you can meet with clients?

It takes some effort and planning, but Quarles & Brady is seeing results from such efforts. Retention rates are high. The firm realizes, though, that the task of finding and keeping great talent is ongoing. First impressions are critical to law students and recruits, and the firm is continuously conscious of the look and feel of their spaces. They realize that environment plays a huge role in each person’s daily experience.

“Personally, what I like best is the fact that I walk around and see people smiling because of the environment,” says D. Linden Barber, Managing Partner Indianapolis. “The space makes everyone so happy, and that translates into doing good work.”

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patricia S. Algiers, ASID and CNU-Accredited, is the President and Founder of Chemistry in Place, a firm focused on combining creativity with design and business expertise. Algiers and her team help clients rethink, rebrand, redesign and reinvent the way they do business.

[LinkedIn](#)

[Website](#)

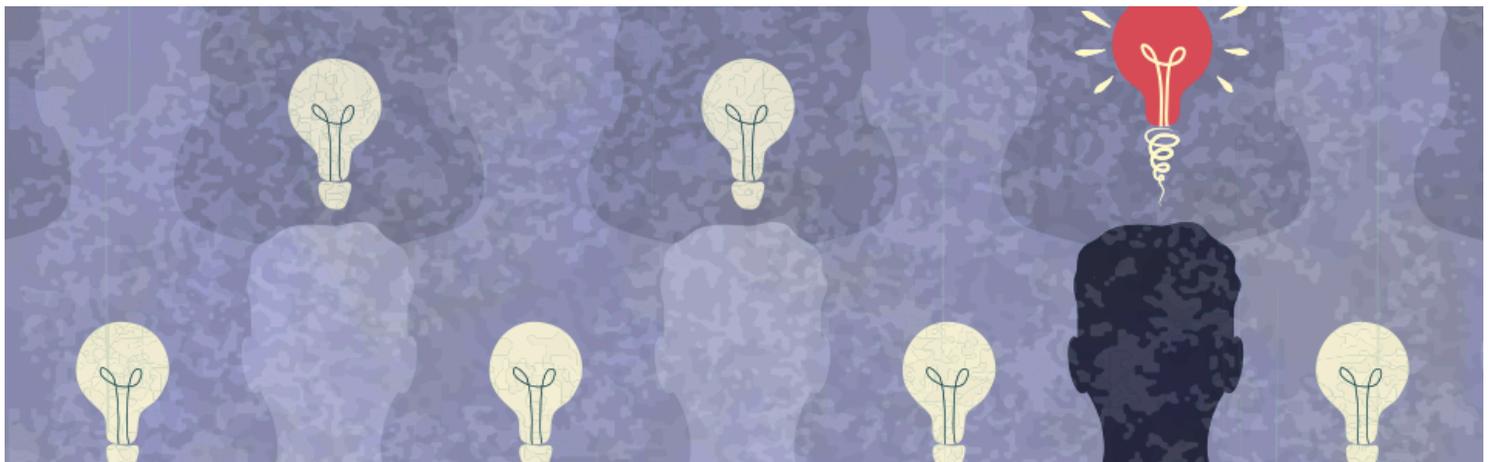
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## An Overview of Indianapolis

Design features include the following:

- 360-degree views of downtown Indianapolis
- Flexibility to intuitively respond to changes and growth
- Generous client hospitality areas
- “Third Spaces” for collaboration and focused work
- Translucent glass external and internal office fronts
- Walk-Station Room with view of downtown
- Single-size attorney offices
- Internal paralegal floor-to-ceiling Steelcase Via Architectural Wall offices
- Panel-free secretarial stations bounded by counter height work/communication areas
- Mobility spaces for visiting clients, attorneys, and staff
- White noise in corridors and open areas



# Tips For Success

## Ideas For Your Firm

1. It is possible for geographically divergent offices to all feel the same, but look different. Feeling is a reflection of culture.
  2. Culture is what embraces and emotionally connects attorneys and employees to a firm, and it helps attract and retain clients.
  3. A great deal is changing in law and business. It is not only about keeping ahead of change, but also embracing change as a constant.
  4. Optimization of resources and environment means providing individuals and teams with what they need to do their best work.
  5. Celebrating each city's distinct presence and capitalizing on the positives while remaining true to the firm's culture sets each office apart in the local landscape.
  6. Good business practices and human relationships all come down to one simple concept: Make people happy. A positive environment sets the stage for positive interactions, satisfied clients and happy employees.
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