

BEST OF
2008
AWARDS

Walter P Moore Office, Houston

JUDGES AWARD: Design

When Walter P Moore and Associates wanted to relocate, it turned to its clients to determine what changes needed to be made. The design provided by architectural firm Gensler offered a more collaborative environment and a space that helped define the engineering firm as a forward-thinking company.

Previously, engineers occupied enclosed offices, and CAD drafters were separated in their own “open plan” by tall dividing walls. The new design encourages more interaction, with CAD drafters interspersed with groups of engineers in a primarily open

plan with lowered divider walls.

Flexible conference rooms were built into the arrangement of offices along the core. In addition, a large, impressive staircase now connects all three floors of the office, providing access to public areas on each level and encouraging more interaction between employees.

Using a large open plan for the office meant lots of echoing and poor noise control. An acoustical technician was introduced to the project to provide solutions for the many different workspaces.

The firm decided to leave ceiling structure exposed, which provided an added function of serving as an educational feature for the young structural engineers in the office. The challenge arose, however, when the exposed elements needed to be presentable while accommodating both acoustical and lighting control. To conceal the acoustical solution and reflect light to the workspaces, Gensler positioned white drop ceilings, or “clouds,”

throughout the space.

A collaborative effort between Gensler and Walter P Moore’s engineers resulted in the most prominent example of innovative design in the office. Instead of presenting the firm with its own design for a central stairway, Gensler asked the firm’s engineers to come up with a design for a gravity-defying stairway. Gensler selected the winning design of the “floating” stair that utilized the same advanced materials that the firm routinely used in large stadium projects.

The stairway’s primary structure >>

Key Facts

Submitted by: Gensler

Owner: Walter P Moore and Associates Inc., Houston

Architect: Gensler, Houston

General contractor: D.E. Harvey Builders, Houston

Structural engineer: Walter P Moore and Associates, Houston

MEP engineer: Wylie Consulting Engineers, Houston

Security consultant: SST, Stafford, Texas

Acoustical consultant: HFPA Acoustical Consultants Inc., Houston

Lighting consultant: CharterSills, Houston

Mechanical contractor: TD Mechanical Contractors, Houston

Electrical contractor: Melton Electric, Houston

Lighting consultant: CharterSills, Houston

Graphics: Rigsby Hull, Houston

Acoustical consultant: HFP Acoustical Consultants, Houston

Millwork contractor: CRC Mastercraft, Houston





is drawn from its basic elements – guardrails and stair treads – resulting in a minimal form that does not require traditional stair stringers. Cables typically used in long-span roof construction are incorporated into the design as guardrails and form the top chords of the Vierendeel truss system.

Separate precast panels of Ductal make up the treads, which collectively function as the bottom chords of the truss. Finally, the truss web is made up of the solid vertical posts of the guardrail. Vertical steel members at the top of each flight support the cantilevered guardrails, resulting in a floating sensation.

A hanging custom-tuned mass damper – like those typically used to control sway in high-rise buildings – controls vibration from the “floating” stair from the base of each flight.