fuseproject
San Francisco, CA

Can Public Office Landscape increase the flow of ideas among people? A top design firm finds out.

Yves Béhar is chief designer and founder of fuseproject, an industrial design and branding firm. As he and his colleagues were designing Public Office Landscape® for Herman Miller, they were also in the process of relocating. In their new space, a former warehouse in San Francisco's Potrero Hill neighborhood, they used Public Office Landscape to create a Living Office. The buzz of the firm's former location is still there; what's new is a balance of group and private spaces that helps increase the flow of ideas between individuals and creative teams. According to Béhar, "It's helped us build collaborative attitudes stronger than any staff training could have done."

The workplace fosters a higher degree of collaboration.

As Béhar describes it, the fuseproject culture is one in which people "love to cross-pollinate, test their ideas across our different disciplines, and get creative input and feedback." Frequent, intense bursts of collaboration are the norm, and have been since the firm's start-up days.

In its new workplace, fuseproject wanted to build on its unique approach to collaboration. The firm achieved it through a lively balance between places to meet and proactively share work, and those that offer a quiet moment to focus. "Having a variety of spaces to work and meet is great," says Béhar. "There are collaborative areas everywhere. This really speeds things along in our office, without sacrificing the exuberance and spontaneity of our old start-up space."

The firm's new space, with its Public settings, "feel fresh," according to Qin Li, director of industrial design at fuseproject. "You don't need to go to a different space to collaborate or focus—it's all at your workstation. You can add a screen if you need a bit more privacy, and it's easy to install. And if you need to change postures, you can move from the desk to the stand-up work areas. I see a lot of people doing this in our space."

Ideas flow because people are encouraged to move about.

In the fuseproject culture, collaboration is never a matter of staying put. Its new workplace needed to support the firm's view of collaboration: as a fluid capability, not discrete events. As Andrea Small, strategy lead at fuseproject, notes, "what's really working in our space now is how much movement our furniture encourages. And because we have that movement throughout the space, we see what each other is working on, and we're inspired by their work. We're always curious about what's going on in other projects, and that knowledge really adds to the communal wisdom of fuse, and enhances the work that we do. And to me that's a Living Office."

Movement, the ability to work anywhere, and the cross-pollination of ideas they promote translate into more productivity in the eyes of the fuseproject team. "That collaboration really helps us not only come up with ideas faster," says Small, "but also to create ideas that are more insightful. So it's not just the speed, it's also the richness of the ideas."

Case Study

The variety and proximity of settings let people work how they want.

From fuseproject's perspective, having a variety of spaces to work in is not just a luxury, it's part of being effective. In its new workplace, fuseproject uses Public settings to provide choice and variety across the office, in individual, group, private, and shared spaces.

Logan Ray, partner and director of strategy at fuseproject, believes the firm's workplace gives people "the right variety of settings so they can move to the one that suits the activity and the character of the job they want to do." That's important in an office culture where bumping into others is prized. "When you bump into someone," says Ray, "there's always a space nearby to use, whether it's screened in for privacy, or a café-style setting for more collaborative sessions. The variety and proximity are paying big dividends."

HermanMiller