

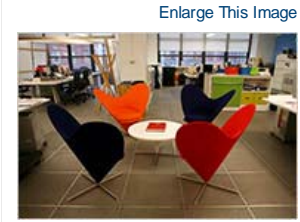
BLUEPRINTS **A Place Where Color and Ideas Converge**



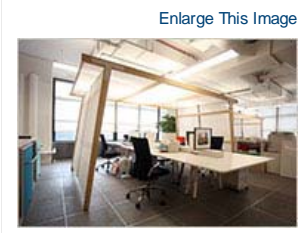
Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times

Charles Patten injected whimsy into the design of Lowe Worldwide's New York office.
By CLAIRES WILSON
Published: March 7, 2009

LOWE WORLDWIDE, a London-based advertising agency, had a tough go of it for many years, going through a string of mergers, as well as layoffs, from which it was slow to recover. As recently as 2006, the agency's finances were "in the basement," according to Mark Wnek, the chairman of Lowe New York.



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times
Bright tulip-shaped canvas wing chairs.



Then things began looking up. New management came in about four years ago and brought along a change in philosophy. Figures improved and new business came knocking.

Proof of the fresh start can be found in Lowe New York's new open space on the western edge of SoHo. **The space was designed by Charles Patten, an architect with Spacesmith** who has been Lowe's architect for 20 years, over many moves and mergers. It occupies 44,000 square feet on the second floor of 250 Hudson Street, in a former print shop.

Lowe New York had 75,000 square feet at its former offices in the Mobil Building on East 42nd Street, where

E-MAIL
SEND TO PHONE
PRINT
REPRINTS
SHARE
ARTICLE TOOLS SPONSORED BY ZOOEY DESCHANEL & JOSEPH GORDON-LEVITT

More Articles in Business »
News for Design Professionals [What's This?](#)
FROM NYTIMES.COM
They're Out of This World
Offering Off-Beat Precision
Shifting the Mood
One Swiss Woman Keeping Tradition of Enamel Vibrant
Display of Names at Trade Center Memorial Is a Painstaking Process
Powered by **LinkedIn**

nytimes.com/travel
Where the conversation begins ▶
Want to see more of the world?

Get DealBook by E-Mail
Sign up for finance news, sent before the opening bell. See [Sample](#)
katiekappes@hotmail.com
[Change E-mail Address](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

MOST POPULAR - BUSINESS

Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times
Some furniture set-ups are designed for privacy, like a fanciful red alcove couch with high sides and wood-framed "huts."

[Enlarge This Image](#)



Hiroko Masuike for The New York Times
There are workstations with bursts of color.

it housed the same 225 employees it has now, according to Sal Taibi, the president of Lowe New York. The move downtown was completed in November; a part of the third floor is occupied by the international division.

Mr. Patten received suggestions from Mr. Wnek about using color — along with a request for an open work area that was the opposite of that of the former location, where everyone had an office or a cubicle. That style was “gigantic, Midtown conglomerate,” according to Mr. Wnek, and not the “small, nimble, highly creative ideas company” that Lowe wanted to become.

“There was a huge dissonance between what we knew we were becoming and what we wanted to become,” Mr. Wnek said. He wanted a set-up that would engender “the architecture of participation.”

“We wanted to stop our business practices from being so linear,” he said.

From a rectangular footprint that had the elevators at its core, Mr. Patten designed a space that puts visitors into the action the moment they enter the 45-foot-long reception area. Banquette seating with bright, striped cushions is used in a pit configuration that is created by the two-foot elevation of raised flooring that was added to accommodate wiring.

In front of the banquettes, metal stools in white, red, yellow and turquoise, and bright, tulip-shaped canvas wing chairs provide a foil to the concrete floor, white walls and wood particle board on the exterior walls of the conference room. Anyone walking onto the floor has an unobstructed view of staff members busy at their workstations, of open meeting areas and of other casual seating areas scattered throughout.

“We wanted people to walk off the elevator and feel the energy of the agency, which you didn’t get before,” Mr. Patten said.

The open feel is enhanced by the low bench-like configuration and low partitions of the workstation system, called Net ‘n’ Nest, designed by Vitra, a company based in Switzerland. The desks are divided by low, upholstered partitions that provide privacy and absorb the sound of conversation. They can be easily removed or slid along the desks to accommodate as many workers as necessary within a space.

“It’s great if you want to increase the number of employees in the same space,” said Jo Kaiser, a managing director at Vitra. The desk/workspace modules are also easy to move to a new location, he said.

The system allows Lowe to add freelancers when work requires them. At the same time, furniture can be arranged to meet requirements of different projects, Mr. Patten said.

Net ‘n’ Nest provides each employee with a personal set of desk drawers that can move along with them. Called a “Follow Me,” it has wheels and a strap for easy portability.


Colored panels and doors on storage units are interchangeable, allowing employees to personalize their space or department. The only private office is reserved for Mr. Wnek. It is furnished with a ‘60s-era pit-style sofa, with one wall covered in metal for magnets. It has a sliding barn-style door, and the exterior is made from the same wood particle board on the exterior of the conference room.

Privacy issues for the rest of the staff are addressed with a variety of solutions. Mr. Taibi, for example, works with an assistant in one of two structures called “huts,” wood-framed configurations resembling a Japanese temple and covered on two sides with a white textile that filters out the sun. The other hut is home to the agency’s strategic planning department.

1. Doctors Raise Doubts on Digital Health Data
2. The Times Plans Temporary Pay Cuts
3. Top Hedge Fund Managers Do Well in a Down Year
4. Geithner to Outline Major Overhaul of Finance Rules
5. There’s Safety in Military Contracts
6. Geithner Calls for Major Overhaul of Financial Rules
7. I.R.S. to Offer Deal to Tax Evaders
8. Paid Handsomely to Stay
9. Assets Frozen for Brother of Madoff
10. Advertising: A Strategy When Times Are Tough: ‘It’s New!’

[Go to Complete List >](#)

The New York Times**THEATER**
nytimes.com/theater



Natasha Richardson's life and career

Also in Theater:

- [Natasha Richardson and the Redgrave dynasty](#)
- [Slide show: Natasha Richardson's career](#)
- [Slide show: scenes from "A Streetcar Named Desire"](#)

ADVERTISEMENTS

Other papers leave you out of the conversation. Get The Weekender.

Get Times Reader Free. A Digital Newspaper That Reads Like The Real Thing.





Listen in on the conversation.

The New York Times
nytimes.com/conversations

Ads by Google

what's this?

[Find a New York Therapist](#)

Premier NYC Therapist Directory. Individual/Couples/Family Therapy.
www.NetworkTherapy.com

[Manhattan Mini Storage](#)

17 Manhattan Storage Facilities Call Now About Our Free Move Offer!
ManhattanMiniStorage.com/StorageNYC

[New York Eye Specialist](#)

48,000+ LASIK, Ken Moadel, MD Bernie Williams Choice. Free Consult
www.NY2020.com/specials/g.html

A number of Vitra furniture set-ups designed for privacy are available to all the staff members, like a fanciful red alcove couch with high sides that create a box-like unit when two are placed opposite each other. Employees use these for impromptu meetings, private conversations and phone calls.

Lowes Worldwide is a division of the [Interpublic Group of Companies](#), whose 2008 profit more than doubled, to \$265.2 million, from \$131.3 million in the previous year. Revenue rose 6 percent, to \$6.96 billion from \$6.55 billion.

Founded in London in 1981 by Sir Frank Lowe, who left the agency and started a new one in 2006, Lowe currently has clients like [Johnson & Johnson](#), Nestlé, Electrolux, Outback Steakhouse and PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Lowes executives also wanted an element of whimsy in the design scheme that goes beyond the funky pieces of high-backed furniture and colorful acoustical panels, or “clouds,” that hang from the ceiling. To that end, Mr. Patten, the architect, added a wall of blue plastic bristles with video monitors mounted on it, a foosball table and a line-up of gumball machines. It’s all anchored by a turquoise, flying-saucer-like couch.

“We wanted it as playful as possible — not a standard office,” he said. “Color, flexibility and playfulness were big issues.”

A version of this article appeared in print on March 8, 2009, on page BU12 of the New York edition.

[More Articles in Business »](#)



[Click here to enjoy the convenience of home delivery of The Times for less than \\$1 a day.](#)

Ads by Google

[what's this?](#)

[Urban Bathroom Design](#)

Full Service Renovation firm FREE Consultation, NYC Showroom
[www.myhomeus.com](#)

[Private NYC Office \\$495](#)

Conf room/Reception, month-to-month call for tour 212.696.0264
[www.BroadwaySuites.net](#)

[Manhattan Mini Storage](#)

17 Manhattan Storage Facilities \$29 Winter Special. Call Us Now!
[ManhattanMiniStorage.com/StorageNYC](#)

Related Searches

[SoHo \(NYC\)](#)

[Get E-Mail Alerts](#)

[Interior Design](#)

[Get E-Mail Alerts](#)

INSIDE NYTIMES.COM



HOME & GARDEN »



[Hands-On History Lessons](#)

FASHION & STYLE »



[The Obamas Get Up Close and Personal in D.C.](#)

OPINION »

Schott's Vocab

A new blog about the words and phrases that encapsulate the times in which we live.

U.S. »



[Cities Deal With a Surge in Shanty Towns](#)

OPINION »



[Op-Ed: Madagascar, an Island of Instability](#)

ART & DESIGN »



[New Admiration for an Old Foe in London](#)

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y./Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Automobiles](#) | [Back to Top](#)

Copyright 2009 The New York Times Company | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)