



text: *laura fisher kaiser*
photography: *eric laignel*

group effort

SmithGroup and the Burgess Group come together in Northern Virginia

Just as psychotherapists prize intelligent patients, open to the process, architects are delighted when a client “gets it.” So SmithGroup was very happy to discover that the Burgess Group, which specializes in software for Medicare and Medicaid reimbursements, wouldn’t need a remedial design tutorial. In an early meeting to discuss the company’s future headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, associate Rob Moylan spied the Isamu Noguchi and Eero Saarinen furniture collected by Greg Burgess—and got a good feeling. “That’s when we started getting really excited about this job,” Moylan recalls. “Plus, he asked a lot of questions, thoughtful questions.”

While several of those modernist classics came along to the new space, two blocks away in a building that SmithGroup had completed months before, Burgess made some big changes overall. Analyzing the company’s values and work flow, he decided to transform the coveted corner-office location into a staff lounge complete with the requisite Wii. The lounge provides respite for software engineers and research analysts who work long hours—and perhaps some compensation for anyone pining for the spacious private offices left behind. Burgess himself still has windows, walls, and a door, but getting most employees out into a bull pen, where they could share ideas, was a key reason he relocated his fast-growing company.

Technology is king, as evidenced by a design lab that takes up slightly less than half the 17,000-square-foot floor plate. It’s here that the intense work of writing proprietary code gets done. Staff members sit at long white benching workstations with low partitions, working silently for the most part, although there’s a palpable sense of many brains concentrating in one place. The dozens of servers that support this creativity are prominently displayed in a climate-controlled LAN room nearby. ➤



Previous spread: SmithGroup divided the staff lounge at the Burgess Group in Alexandria, Virginia, into two groupings. The first comprises a table by Eero Saarinen and chairs by Charles and Ray Eames, the second a sofa and an ottoman by Isamu Noguchi and rocking chairs by Thomas Pedersen. **Opposite top:** Set off by glass panels from the rest of reception, a Noguchi table sits beneath a Marcel Wanders pendant fixture. **Opposite bottom:** Eames chairs surround the conference room’s custom table, topped by back-painted glass with an inset of rift-cut white oak certified by the Forest Stewardship Council.

Top, from left: The design lab’s workstations are by Bob Wayner. FSC-certified white oak veneers cubbies nearby. **Bottom:** Stained-elm flooring, reclaimed from an old barn, flows between the reception desk, built from soapstone and resin, and a 60-foot-long feature wall tiled in Vermont slate.



The other side of the floor is bisected by the 60-foot-long reception gallery, which runs between one zone for executives and administrators and another for sales and support. Both are roughly triangular due to the far end of the building being sheared off at an angle. The resulting curtain wall faces a Federal-style brick jail used for slaves until the Civil War, and southwestern sunshine pours in from that side. On most days, light sensors barely trigger the dimmable ballasts on the linear fixtures—pluses noted in SmithGroup's pending application for LEED-CI Platinum certification.

Moylan enhanced reflectivity by using glass back-painted a matte white for the top of the table in the conference room and paneling in the pantry's eating-meeting room. These two rooms are largely enclosed by glass, conveying transparency while providing acoustical privacy. Ditto for the LAN room and the training room. Against all the glass and the other neutrals—brown carpet, soapstone, oak veneer—accents in the company's logo colors really pop. Burnt orange highlights the occasional steel beam or column. Apple green enlivens millwork and upholstery. Walls in privacy rooms, aka "phone booths," are a muted blue. In the lab, this color scheme is represented in a mural that could at first be mistaken for a tile mosaic but is actually a pixelated photo of President Lyndon Johnson signing Medicare into law. For example, Lady Bird's blue dress matches the privacy rooms.

Color contrasts reflect and promote the duality of a company that's young yet stable, creative yet serious, transparent yet discreet. Materials, meanwhile, convey authenticity and complexity. Running along one side of the reception galley, slate tiles cover an entire wall. Their positions were painstakingly drafted on a computer before four masons spent two weeks setting each 3-by-12-inch rectangle just so—this one flat, that one proud, no broken corners or overage. "A lot of technical effort went into looking natural and random," Moylan says. ➤

A Noguchi table, an Eames stool, Pierre Paulin stools and chairs, George Nelson benches, and Jasper Morrison lighting furnish the cork-lined break-out area. It serves as a passage between the two sides of the design lab.



- 1 RECEPTION
- 2 CONFERENCE ROOM
- 3 LOUNGE
- 4 PANTRY
- 5 DESIGN LAB
- 6 TRAINING ROOM
- 7 BREAK-OUT AREA





A massive expanse of dark slate might sound oppressive, but the raw stone actually feels warm and inviting, thanks in part to its context. The angled curtain wall at the end of the gallery enables daylight to penetrate practically to the building's core. Wide elm floorboards, reclaimed barn siding, are stained a toffee color and set on the diagonal, drawing the eye toward the windows and making the space seem wider. Moylan chose the elm for its durability. "Stilettos will wreck almost any wood floor," he notes. As if on cue, two female employees appear in 6-inch needle heels that would make *Sex and the City's* Carrie Bradshaw swoon. 🍷

PROJECT TEAM

ANDREW ROLLMAN (PRINCIPAL); **HOLLY HARSHMAN** (PROJECT ARCHITECT); **PATRICK GREEN; PAUL HURT; CHRISTINE CLOWES**: SMITHGROUP; **THEOBALD BUFANO + ASSOCIATES**: STRUCTURAL ENGINEER; **IBS MILLWORK**: WOODWORK; **BOATMAN AND MAGNANI**: STONework; **HITT CONTRACTING**: GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT **FOSCARINI**: LAMP (LOUNGE). **FREDERICIA FURNITURE**: ROCKING CHAIRS. **VITRA**: SOFA, OTTOMAN. **KNOLL**: STOOLS (LOUNGE), TABLES (LOUNGE, RECEPTION). **HERMAN MILLER**: SIDE CHAIRS (LOUNGE), CHAIRS (CONFERENCE ROOM, LAB), BENCHES (HALL, BREAK-OUT AREA), TABLE, WOODEN STOOL (BREAK-OUT AREA). **FINELITE**: LINEAR FIXTURES (LOUNGE, LAB). **THROUGH PIONEER MILLWORKS**: FLOORING (LOUNGE, RECEPTION). **THROUGH DANIEL DONNELLY**: CREDENZA (LOUNGE), TABLE (PANTRY). **HBF**: SIDE CHAIRS (RECEPTION). **FLOS**: PENDANT FIXTURE (RECEPTION), PENDANT FIXTURE, LAMP (BREAK-OUT AREA). **WALLGOLD-FINGER**: CUSTOM TABLE (CONFERENCE ROOM). **SPINNEYBECK**: CHAIR UPHOLSTERY. **ARMSTRONG**: CEILING SYSTEM. **NOOD**: CUSTOM CARPET. **TANDUS**: CARPET TILE (CONFERENCE ROOM, LAB). **FOCAL POINT**: RECESSED LINEAR FIXTURES (CONFERENCE ROOM, PANTRY). **HAWORTH**: WORK-STATIONS, TASK LAMPS (LAB). **SIELING & JONES**: CUBBY SURFACING. **VERMONT STRUCTURAL SLATE COMPANY**: WALL TILE (RECEPTION). **KEILHAUER**: TASK CHAIR. **3FORM**: DESK PANEL MATERIAL (RECEPTION), PANEL MATERIAL (PANTRY). **TO MARKET**: SURFACING (BREAK-OUT AREA). **ARTIFORT**: UPHOLSTERED STOOLS, CHAIRS. **MAHARAM**: CHAIR FABRIC. **FRITZ HANSEN**: CHAIRS (TRAINING ROOM). **NUCRAFT**: TABLES. **FORBO**: FLOORING (TRAINING ROOM, PASS-THROUGH, PANTRY). **DESIGNTEX**: CUSTOM MURAL (LAB). **LZF LAMPS**: PENDANT FIXTURES (PANTRY). **CHERNER CHAIR COMPANY**: STOOLS. **THROUGHOUT KURT VERSEN**: RECESSED CEILING FIXTURES. **BENJAMIN MOORE & CO.**: PAINT.



Opposite top: Hironichi Konna designed the training room's chairs. **Opposite bottom:** A pass-through in the feature wall connects the pantry to the design lab.

Top: A 1965 photo of President Lyndon Johnson signing Medicare into law was enlarged, pixelated, tweaked to match the company's logo colors, printed on bamboo paper, and mounted in the design lab. **Bottom, from left:** Over the breakfast bar in the pantry hangs a pendant fixture by Ray Power. The conference table from the previous office gets reused in the pantry's eating-meeting room, where back-painted glass paneling can be scribbled on like whiteboard.