

THE NEW OFFICE

Three Projects Foster Collaboration, Transparency and Community

BY NORA BURBA TRULSSON

FREIGHT

Denver, Colorado

STEPHEN DYNIA ARCHITECTS

Jackson, Wyoming

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RON JOHNSON

JUST NORTH OF DOWNTOWN DENVER, IN AN INDUSTRIAL AREA WEDGED BETWEEN the Platte River and a tangle of railroad yards, an abandoned trucking terminal has been transformed into modern office building, attracting youthful, entrepreneurial firms, and winning design awards for the architect and accolades for the developer.

The 20,000-square-foot project, Freight, is part of the 20-acre Taxi mixed-use development that has revived the River North neighborhood, thanks to the out-of-the-box approach of a Denver development firm, Zepelin Places. The firm, run by the father and son team of Mickey and Kyle Zeppelin, has also been responsible for such forward-thinking projects as Cadillac Lofts, pioneering LoDo projects and Curious Theatre.

The Freight project began in 2007, explains architect Stephen Dynia, AIA, who was asked to transform the circa-1950s terminal. Though a softening economy stalled the project, it was restarted in 2010.

“We wanted the new offices to be friendly towards smaller businesses,” explains Dynia, who also maintains a satellite office in Denver. “We also wanted to continue what the Zeppelins started with Taxi, which is adjacent to Freight.” Working with a team that included Doug Staker, AIA, LEED AP, Dynia suggested a design that left much of the building’s raw, trucking past intact—including the deep overhangs and garage bay openings—and inserted some vividly modern new elements.

At the eastern end of the rectangular building, Dynia, Staker and the design team created a new wing of offices, reusing trusses from the razed administrative quarters of the old trucking firm and cladding its exterior in metal siding that’s a subtle reference to the movement of nearby rail cars. On the north side, a pre-fab, shed-style building was re-skinned and pierced with windows to create yet another wing of offices. An angled entry ramp was added next to the re-skinned addition to lead visitors from the main parking area to the building’s entrance.

Indoors, the Dynia team created a floorplan with a long, skylit circulation spine that connects offices, shared conference areas, a kitchen and lounge, and restrooms. A sculptural plywood ribbon wall

Much of the original freight terminal was kept intact for the office renovation, including deep overhangs and garage bay openings. The new addition to the right is clad in metal panels that evoke the movement of freight rail cars.





Top: A long hallway, punctuated by a curving plywood wall and a narrow skylight, links the offices. Above: New retractable glass garage doors allow individual offices to have access to breezes and views of Denver's skyline.

softens the circulation hallway, and individual offices are linked to the outdoors with retractable, garage-style glass doors. The scarred concrete floors and existing walls were left untouched as reminders of the building's past, but new walls and metal details were enlivened with a bright, international orange hue.

The actual office sizes vary in size and look, but are linked by common materials. "We gave the tenants a kit of components that they could use to personalize their spaces," says Dynia. The kit included reclaimed glass panels from a hockey rink that could be used as partition walls, industrial shelving and salvaged bowling alley floors that could be made into countertops, benches and tables.

Completed in February 2011, Freight's raw, urban appeal was an immediate hit. It opened fully occupied, to new-economy firms as varied as an early-childhood education center and a cracker company to a filmmaker and a wildlife conservation organization. In July, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper used the success of the development as a backdrop to launch a new economic initiative.

"These are interesting companies that opened at Freight because it's not a stodgy, suburban environment," reflects Dynia. "The building and its location next to Taxi lets the tenants connect to an immediate culture."

Business success notwithstanding, Freight has also won numerous 2011 design awards, including ones from AIA Western Mountain Region, AIA Colorado, AIA Wyoming and AIA Denver.

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