

CHICAGO ARCHITECT

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TWO BRANDS, ONE CONTEMPORARY SPACE

CONDÉ NAST AND PITCHFORK COME TOGETHER UNDER ONE ROOF

The publishing world isn't always the glamorous and chic one portrayed in the movies: the crisp white offices and skyline views in *The Devil Wears Prada* certainly did not represent the offices that housed Chicago's Condé Nast branch and their recently-acquired Pitchfork properties. Condé's sales teams sat in the Hancock Tower's 35th floor perimeter offices where no natural light entered, making for a dreary and dark setting. The Pitchfork brand was at home for years in a Logan Square residential property. While the homey feeling was perfect for their laid-back style in the contemporary music

journalism and festival business, its design team was working out of the garage.

The Condé group decided to bring all of its Chicago teams together under one roof, soliciting the expertise of GREC Architects to design a new home for them on the 21st floor of the Merchandise Mart. Led by Project Designer Liz Potokar, LEED AP; Director of Interiors and Project Manager Michael Berger; and Project Designer Cameron Laabs, LEED AP, GREC technical designer, the team worked closely with the client to solve major challenges of integrating these different groups.

According to Potokar, the Condé sales teams were often feeling the heat of competing with each other for similar ad sales. Compounded by the dreary environments, this atmosphere caused an existing desire to work from home. The Pitchfork team enjoyed their access to an outdoor space and kitchens but wanted to be more versatile. "Both groups wanted to grow their programs, with a space to entertain. They never brought clients in at Condé and instead met them off-site; Pitchfork wanted a spot to throw parties and invite artists to perform," she said.

David Grifford, vice president of corporate real estate & facilities at Condé Nast, had high hopes for the Merchandise Mart offices: "We wanted to break away from stereotypical 'glossy media' office space," he explained. "We were looking to give our employees a place to work that was really inviting and maximized the square footage. We knew we wanted an open concept plan that was comfortable and provided as much natural light as possible."

The design team sought solutions to the requirements and unique desires to each group — a challenge of its own. But placing both in the same space meant that there also had to be some type of partition with shared spaces for collaboration, meetings and relaxing.

The final result is a 12,000-square-foot, full-floor office with shared kitchen and lounge completed in March 2017. The workspaces are open and flow circuitously, beginning and ending in the reception area. The

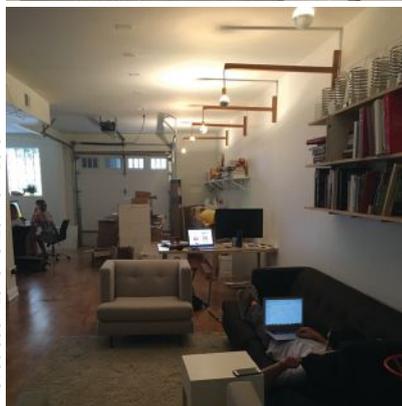
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— DAVID GRIFFORD

kitchen features many home-style amenities and detailing, including Shaker-style cabinetry in contrasting white and navy blue, exposed brick supporting raw wood shelving and hanging Edison bulbs. The reception area also provides a stage with an elevated platform, extending dark wood flooring toward two large glass doors that lead to the not-yet-completed rooftop deck — a feature that replicates the group's beloved outdoor space from their former home.

The work spaces are open, and the kitchen acts as a hearth that connects both brands' offices. Pitchfork employees sit on the east and Conde Nast to the west. Both have expansive views of the river and downtown with plentiful natural light throughout. A poured flooring and exposed ductwork

Before



PHOTOS COURTESY OF GREC ARCHITECTS

and plumbing provide an industrial feel — a subtle contrast to the softer tones of the kitchen and lounge. Open floorplans encourage collaboration and meeting rooms strike a necessary balance.

The workspace partition that divides Condé from Pitchfork works both visually and acoustically and provides large- and small-group meeting rooms and private phone booths. Potokar noted that visiting the original Pitchfork office inspired her to leave these rooms to be decorated by the staff themselves. “They have such an amazing collection of original artwork, we wanted to make sure they could showcase it in those spaces,” she said. The meeting rooms’ black, eight-panel glass pane doors extend the color contrasts and bring natural light into those enclosed spaces. Pops of bright orange dot the exterior window panes throughout the office — Potokar’s favorite design moment.

“We weren’t designing for a theme,” Potokar said, “we were trying to evoke emotion. This is what their business does, and we asked how this space could reflect that. It feels more like home, less like a corporate office.”

“Condé Nast is in the middle of an exciting transformation,” Grifford added. “This space is inviting and encourages collaboration across brands. It was designed with our future in mind.” Simultaneously comfortable yet industrial, the new Condé Nast and Pitchfork offices address the challenges of bringing two brands together in one contemporary space — without the cinematic drama. **CA**

PROJECT TEAM

Michael Berger, Director of Interiors and Project Manager; Liz Potokar, LEED AP, Project Designer; Project Contractor Cameron Laabs, LEED AP, Technical Designer

CONSULTANTS

Executive Construction Inc, General Contractor CBRE, Project Management and Broker Services; Thomas Interiors, Furniture Dealer



PHOTOS BY TOM HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHY