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Office Space: Traditional Style Meets Modern Function

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Supplement

Office Space

New design elements and technology blend with historic architecture to create office space that functions well in modern times.

1. Meeting Common Needs and Department-Specific Requirements

At Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge, Mass., Building 11 is part of the main group of buildings on campus, connected to the “infinite corridor” — a system of interior hallways that form a large part of the Institute’s culture.

An architect was engaged to design the upper three floors for the relocation of staff from three departments — Bursar, Registrar and Financial Aid — that support the new Student Services Center on the ground floor, also designed by the same architect. Programming was crucial to the success of the project. The team worked with the staff to identify common needs and define areas needing department-specific solutions. This effort meshed with MIT’s efforts to re-engineer how administrative departments worked together and improved customer service.

On the ground floor, the Student Services Center allowed student access to the three departments at one central location. This supports teamwork among the administrative staff, uses technology to greatest advantage and enables 24-hour student access to computers. The challenge was to create a vibrant, user-friendly atmosphere within the existing character of an older campus structure. The entrance court, flanked by existing columns and lighted with a recessed dome, echoes the campus’s main rotunda. The reception entry windows and sweep of the main reception desk provide a sense of openness. Student consultations take place in a series of private work-stations designed to allow both confidentiality and casual access.

Upstairs, 3,000 sq. ft. of useable space had to be added to meet the program. This was achieved by capturing space once used for a mechanical penthouse. Relocating and expanding the mechanical rooms required close collaboration with the consulting engineers, the project management team and MIT Design and Construction. Building an addition to this historic building also resulted in the replacement of the original steel windows and required extensive design review with administrators. The design was presented and approved, and the project moved forward.

Because of structural limitations, masonry was not an option. Instead alternate materials were selected to echo the existing structure. The form of the clearstory curve relates to the nearby domes of the engineering library and the iconic main dome — while providing natural lighting on the interior.

The 10,000-sq.-ft. first floor of this \$3.3-million project was completed in 1999 by HKT Architects, Inc., of Somerville, Mass.



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