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SMALL BUSINESS GROWTH STRATEGIES

In a bind, law firm finds light at the end of the tube

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After 25 years in the same M Street location, the D.C. office of global law firm Morgan, Lewis and Bockius moved to a prestigious address on Pennsylvania Avenue early last year, occupying a building that it had spent more than five years planning and overhauling.

The overhaul fell just short of tearing down the 12-story structure and starting over. Every floor was gutted to bare concrete and steel; two more floors were added on top and a height-matching L-shaped extension was constructed at the rear, wrapping around the back of the adjacent building.

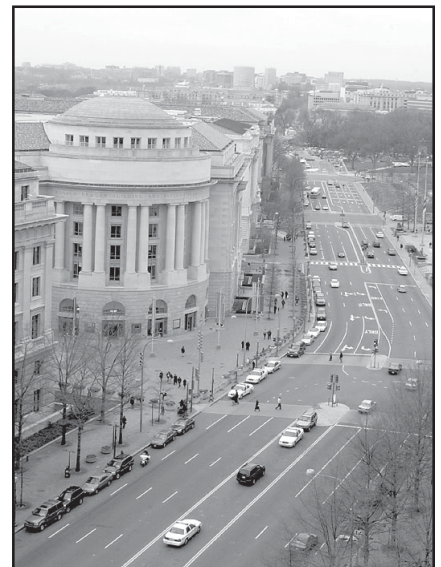
That gave free rein to the design firm, Studios Architecture (www.studiosarch.com), to realize Morgan Lewis' ambitions to make the space more efficient than its previous quarters and to incorporate dramatic design elements intended to project an image of a bold and innovative firm that is a major player on the Washington legal scene.

Typically the oversight for such a project is assigned to a committee, but Morgan Lewis (www.morganlewis.com) decided to streamline the process by putting one partner, Stephen Paul Mahinka, in charge of everything: the planning, design, buildout and move.

Mahinka met with Studios weekly, and eventually daily, to review plans, consider options and resolve issues. This approach meant that thousands of decisions did not have to wait for committee meetings or get bogged down in drawn-out discussions to build consensus.



Morgan Lewis' new office building has 46 conference rooms, the largest of which can be reconfigured for sit-down meals.



JOANNE S. LAWTON / STAFF

Law firm Morgan Lewis put partner Stephen Paul Mahinka in charge of five-year effort to work with architects on new space in a Pennsylvania Avenue building that is topped with a terrace providing dramatic views of Washington.

THE NATURAL SOLUTION

Early on in the design, the law firm and its architects had to decide what to do about the interface between the new addition at the back and the blank wall of the building it sits behind. Zoning restrictions required

that the new structure not touch the old one, which has historic significance as the former home of the old Evening Star newspaper.

The decision was to insert an atrium 50 feet long and 8 feet wide with a skylight at the top. But Mahinka worried that, even



JOANNE S. LAWTON / STAFF

A 120-foot solar light tube, suspended in the narrow atrium that connects two parts of the structure, resolved a gloomy lighting issue.

■ CLOSE UP

- **The firm:** Morgan, Lewis & Bockius
- **The place:** 1111 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
- **What makes it special:** A huge "solar light tube" brings natural sunlight and a striking visual focal point to every floor of the law firm's new Pennsylvania Avenue building.

with the skylight, the lower levels of the narrow atrium would be gloomy.

Studios' solution was brilliant, in both senses of the word. It arranged to have a huge "solar light tube" designed, fabricated and suspended in the atrium by cables to bring abundant natural sunlight and a striking visual focal point to every floor.

A motorized heliostatic mirror on the roof tracks the sun's movement and bounces sunlight into another set of mirrors that beam it down the tube. On cloudy days and at night, electric light "cannons" turn on automatically to keep the tube illuminated.

The tube, 120 feet long and 6 feet wide, comprises a slightly tapered inner cylinder formed with 236 prismatic glass panels and a gauzy Lycra sheath on the outside. The panels refract the light horizontally into the

offices and hallways around the atrium; the sheath diffuses it to prevent glare.

A MOOT (COURT) POINT

By starting with an empty shell and a newly constructed addition, Morgan Lewis could tailor the space to its needs and add facilities that were lacking or inadequate at its previous location.

On the second floor, for example, clients and other visitors have access to a complete business center, with small private offices, larger caucus rooms and individual desks, all with phones and computer hookups. Fax and copying machines are nearby, as are two secretarial stations to provide assistance.

The second floor also has a fully equipped moot courtroom, complete with judge's bench and jury box.

"It's something like a flight simulator for aviators," Mahinka says.

Attorneys use the space to practice courtroom presentations and prepare clients for the unfamiliar and sometimes daunting experience of a trial. The moot courtroom also is used on occasion for real-life arbitrations.

In its M Street quarters, Morgan Lewis didn't have enough space for its frequent meetings, seminars, conferences and receptions. That problem has gone away in the new building, which has 46 conference rooms—double the previous number.

The largest one is a theaterlike two-story room with modular furniture on wheels. It can be reconfigured quickly to seat up to 130 people for presentations or 80 for sit-down meals. A flow-through serving room and food warming kitchen are at the rear.

The counters in the serving room—and elsewhere throughout the building—are made of a rare black Moroccan marble imbedded with fossils.

OFFICE FIREWORKS

The city required the addition on top of the building to be set back far enough to be invisible from the street. As a result, the rooms open onto a terrace with a spectacular view of the Washington Monument, the Capitol, the Jefferson Memorial, Arlington Cemetery, the Rosslyn skyline and other landmarks.

Typically a law firm's senior partners would have their offices in such a choice spot, Mahinka says, but Morgan Lewis decided to put its employee cafeteria there, along with two smaller dining rooms for entertaining clients.

In good weather diners can eat at umbrella-shaded tables outdoors. There are even computer hookups near the tables.

"A dining center with a view like this one is a benefit that no other firm can offer its employees," Mahinka says.

But it does pose one problem: On the Fourth of July, nearly all of the firm's 800 people want to watch the fireworks from the terrace and bring their families too. That necessitates a lottery to choose the lucky few.

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