



Ron Howard and Brian Grazer Unveil Tech-Inspired New Offices

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Workspaces at Imagine in Beverly Hills — as well as entertainment law firm Del Shaw's new space in Century City — reflect "a creative environment that stimulates conversation," says 'Solo' director Howard.

Two new headquarters for a pair of top entertainment companies are setting the standard for Hollywood office design circa 2018. The big news is that large private offices are a bit passe, at least below the chairman and CEO level. At Ron Howard and Brian Grazer's Imagine Entertainment, which moved into new 28,000-square-foot offices in Beverly Hills just south of Wilshire Boulevard in 2017, the average office size "shrank a little bit from where they were before,"

says Aimee Less, interior design director of Rios Clementi Hale Studios (RCHS), the architects behind the project. The space is highlighted by a wall decorated with script pages from projects over the years, including *A Beautiful Mind*, *Apollo 13* and *Empire*.

Taking a cue from the tech world, some entertainment companies are paring back on personal workspaces to give more room to shared areas as a way of sparking connection among employees. At Imagine — which occupies two airy floors in a newly renovated building once occupied by William Morris Agency on South El Camino Drive — that means not only a formal conference room but also casual spaces with sofas and chairs, a coffee bar with tall stools and a tiered bleacher-style presentation area where a yoga class is held occasionally on Fridays. "This definitely reflects our desire to create a very creative environment that stimulates conversation and that has a little more space for people to come and hang out with us," says company executive chairman Howard, whose *Solo: A Star Wars Story* premiered May 11 in Los Angeles, will see another star-studded screening in Cannes May 15 and opens wide May 25. "I love that we have more places to get out of your office and go talk to one another."

Howard admits their old office, just one block away and decorated in typical industry fashion with movie and TV show posters, was starting to have "a little more '90s feel. It was elegant and I liked it, but it was more about individual spaces." Adds his co-founder Grazer, who took the lead on the redesign, "It couldn't be more the opposite of what we had." And while Grazer's and Howard's offices are as roomy as any corner office in Hollywood, they have areas that lend themselves to inclusive meetings. In Grazer's, it's a sectional couch that can fit 10; in Howard's, there's a large work table in lieu of a desk. "It's really built to be a place to roll up our sleeves and lay problems out on the table and crack them," says Howard.

The same thinking goes into the new offices of entertainment law firm Del Shaw Moonves Tanaka Finkelstein & Lezcano, on the 17th floor of a tower in Century City, which mixes warm wood tones with pops of color throughout its 13,300-square-

foot layout. The old offices were more hierarchical. "It was traditional: Partners in law firms have always had big offices; associates have small offices," says Jeff Finkelstein, a partner at the firm, which represents Hulu content chief Joel Stillerman, Tiffany Haddish, Lena Waithe, Lupita Nyong'o, Ava DuVernay, John Legend and Chrissy Teigen.

Now — in Del Shaw's new space, designed by Tim Gajewski of NxT Studio — associates' offices are the same size as the partners, while the number of meeting spaces has increased and includes four conference rooms, for a total staff of 35 people. "As a boutique law firm, we're very collaborative, and this new space promotes that," says Finkelstein. "It makes it welcoming for associates to come into partners' offices." Adds partner Gordon Bobb: "Here, everyone sits and has lunch together and uses the same meeting areas. It really speaks to the culture of the firm."

Bobb adds that the move to Century City — the old offices were in Santa Monica — also had to do with the fact that the center of gravity in the business is shifting eastward, with, for example, Netflix and Viacom moving to Hollywood. Says Bobb: "For us, being out in Santa Monica became burdensome. We were not really in close proximity to our clients. We felt a little out on an island."

Neither company, though, wanted to go too cool or hip. "They didn't want it to feel like a startup," says RCHS' Less of Imagine's new home. "Because of their history, Brian [Grazer] wanted it to feel rooted and mature but still have a youthfulness to it." Overall, the hues at each company's offices are fairly restrained. Modern notes come from the exposed ceilings, concrete floors and, says Less, "injections of color to add excitement, especially in communal sitting areas." Adds Gajewski of his work at Del Shaw, "They didn't want it to be trendy or something that would go out of fashion."

Other design elements in the Del Shaw space include adjustable sit/stand desks for all employees, while each office has visitor seating with armchairs and upholstered window banquettes that offer views of the city. In the age of laptops and mobile devices, no one needs to be tethered to a desk.

Says Gajewski of his Del Shaw clients, "They tend to move around the entire office."

Both companies prioritized as design objectives displaying art. Del Shaw has a corporate collection, much of which was acquired by former partner and top L.A. collector Michael Rubell, now a managing partner at CAA. For its walls, Imagine worked with CalArts School of Art in an innovative partnership to show students' work. "Imagine called us and asked if we'd be interested," says School of Art dean Thomas Lawson, who put out a call among graduate and upper-level undergrads for submissions. Around two dozen were chosen to participate. "It's really exciting for the students to have an opportunity to show their work to a group of really high-performing professionals." Grazer's private office includes his own paintings as well as a work by artist Hermes Berrio.

Bringing in natural light was also critical to the design teams. At Del Shaw, brightening the space was accomplished by using frosted glass for the private-office walls that front hallways. Gajewski also designed a conference room with a retractable glass wall. When the room isn't in use — 90 percent of the time — the walls go away. "It enlarges our reception area and takes advantage of the views [with] eight windows," says Finkelstein. At Imagine, RCHS opened sight lines along public spaces on the building perimeter to amplify natural light.

One big change that employees at both companies had to adjust to was a unified look for all the private offices. Previously, Del Shaw attorneys and the Imagine execs chose their own furniture. "People had a real hodgepodge. We tried to have a more curated collection across the office," says RCHS' Less. Both Gajewski at Del Shaw and RCHS at Imagine created a limited selection of couch, chair and fabric choices for employees. "Because people had had total ownership of their office, we worked with each person," adds Less. "They participated in the process and felt they were choosing their space."

Hollywood being Hollywood, redesigns aren't just about improving corporate culture. They are also about branding. Imagine was founded in 1986, Del Shaw in 1989. With their

new offices, the companies, each in business for more than a quarter-century, have sought to smartly update and reset their image. "We feel like this is a rebirth, a 2.0 of the law firm, so we wanted to make sure we are forward-thinking in the design and that it will take us through the next 28 years," says Del Shaw's Bobb.

At Imagine, the aim was to have offices that reflect the company's more diversified direction; in recent years, it has expanded into documentaries, events and branded content. The new office not only "encourages more interfacing between the company categories," says Howard, but also shows "we're a very different company. We have much more of a dealmaking attitude in who our potential partners can be and we're much more actively involved in more facets of the medium."

Two stand-out design notes include the wall of script pages, which were aged by dipping them in coffee and tea — "I love that it honors the writers who have had such an impact on what we've done over the years," says Howard — and a different wall that's decorated with abstracted images from the company's movie posters. "I think it's a balance of giving them something unique to them but also using materials people are familiar with," says Huay Wee, project manager with Rios Clementi Hale.

Simply put: Cool new headquarters are a great way to attract fresh talent and collaborators. Waithe, a client of Del Shaw co-founder Nina Shaw since 2013, visited the offices for the first time April 19. "I think it represents these guys. It's a cool, hip, welcoming, warm environment," Waithe says. "Everything is just really fly and sleek."

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