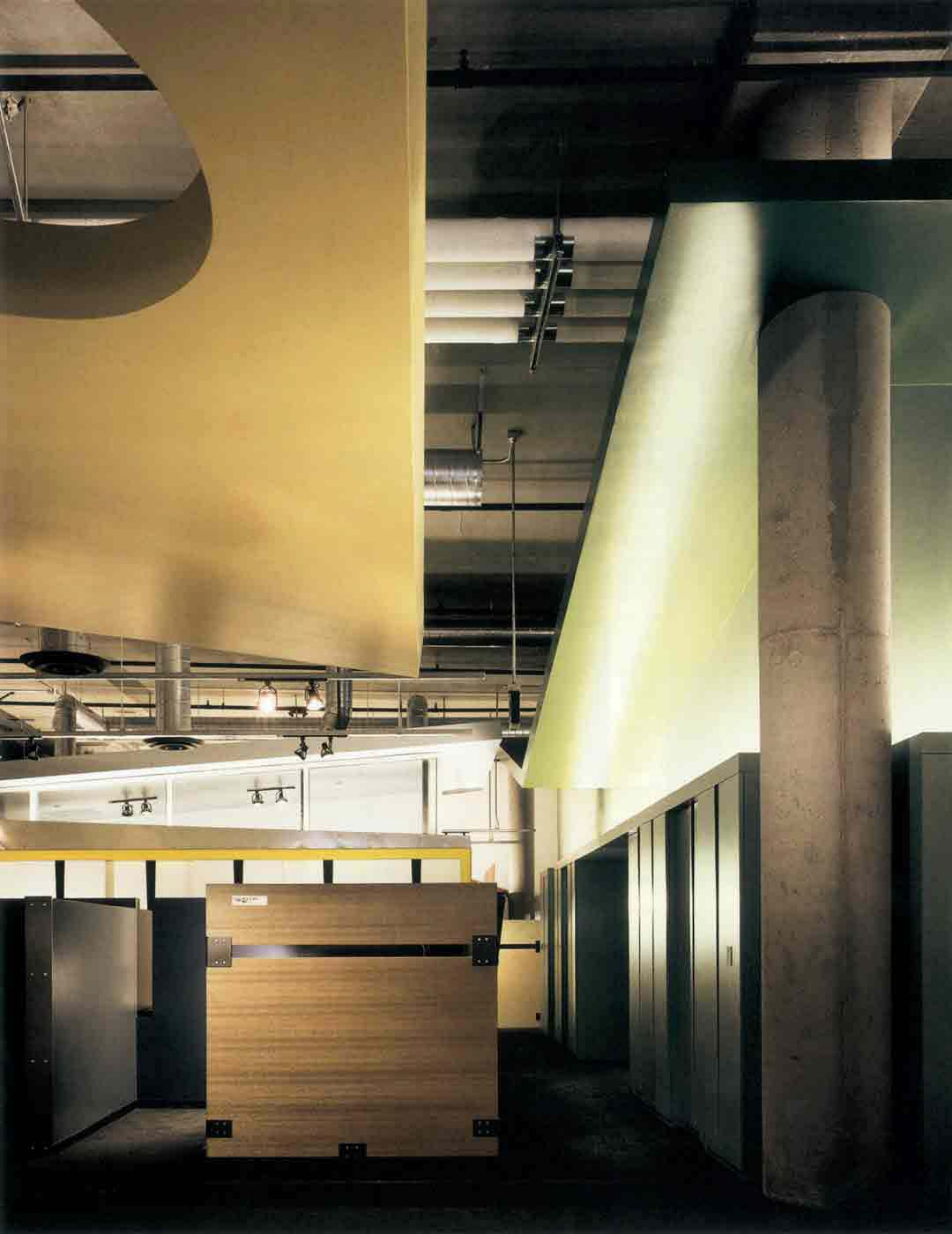


INTERIOR DESIGN

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Technodreams *Designing for a brave new world*

Taslimi





Cutting Wedge

Deep in the wilds of Hollywood, Area creates animation headquarters for Klasky Csupo.

THESE DAYS, THE LOCATION of choice for Los Angeles production studios is apt to be on the city's west side. Santa Monica, a stretch of Olympic Boulevard, parts of Venice, and even Westwood are all targeted zones. There are, however, contrarians opting to buck trends. Arlene Klasky and Gabor Csupo, founders of the namesake animation studio that brings us Rug Rats and other cartoon staples of the Nickelodeon network, purposefully sought a property in an as-yet ungentrified part of Hollywood. Having worked there for 20 years, the partners found a comfort level and real estate values unmatched elsewhere. But their first choice for a headquarters location seemed questionable. Why buy a former Mercedes dealership on Sunset near Vine?

The 100,000-sq.-ft. building was rife with daunting conditions. Area, the firm known for plush entertainment offices with prestigious addresses (as well as Nickelodeon's own Burbank headquarters), had never seen anything like this. Almost two-thirds of the structure had been devoted to car service bays. This translated into a complete lack of

windows and air conditioning, and only minimal electrical service. Gravel pits, hydraulic lifts, and ungainly ramps were other conditions of the interior landscape. Finally, the plan itself—comprising a six-story office tower and 400-ft.-long first floor—posed plenty of challenges. Area's Henry Goldston and Walt Thomas were not to be deterred.

First came structural work. Windows were added; mechanical services provided; and level disparities at the rear auto court were made even, readying the area for an entry/reception zone since the building had no true street-front presence. Except for the tower, where offices were retained, the space was gutted to a shell with a 25-ft.-high exposed concrete ceiling and columns.

Obviously, a chief challenge was to bring order to a potentially overwhelming sea of work stations. "We wanted to create intimacy within the large floor plate," says Goldston. A less tangible aspect of the solution entailed interpreting the clients' mandate: "Don't make us look juvenile or cartoon-like." Goldston recalls, "They wanted the space to be →

Opposite: Soaring drywall forms create implied neighborhoods within the open expanse. Uplighting is concealed within the file wall.

Above, left: The red elliptical form marks the office's entry/reception zone.

Above, right: Color and forms humanize the scale of a 400-ft.-long floor with 25-ft.-high ceiling.

PHOTOGRAPHY: JON MILLER, HEDRICH BLESSING



sophisticated, adult, and cool. And they had to have color.”

Thomas and Goldston made a few bold moves. Introducing a quartet of drywall forms—painted lipstick red, aqua, green and yellow—the designers established neighborhood beacons in the open expanse and also satisfied the program’s chromatic requirement. Further, the tops of these forms provided a vehicle to conceal air and power units.

Work stations are custom-made from various plywood veneers, steel brackets, and drywall splines. Colored acrylic panels are integrated into the system as dividers and identification markers at the end of each row. The work station design accommodates indirect lighting sources within splines, and each station has two overhead spotlights that can be connected or not, according to the worker’s whim. The overall light level, achieved with concealed uplighting, is kept low in deference to animators’ preferred way of viewing their computer screens.

“The general feeling of the space is somewhat dark, moody, mysterious and mechanical,” according to Thomas and Goldston. “Black carpeting throughout the office lends contrast to the plywood and metal stations, and purposely mismatched colors define the abstract shapes.”

Klasky Csupo was completed in six months. Kathy Troutfetter shares credit with Area’s partners. —*Edie Cohen*

Above: View within reception area to the studio where custom stations are created from plywood panels, steel brackets, drywall, and colored acrylic.

CARPET: SHAW. MILLWORK: F.K. ANDERSON & SONS. PAINT: PRATT & LAMBERT. HVAC: AIR-TECH. ELECTRICAL WORK: SASCO. DOORS, HARDWARE: SEELEY BROTHERS. ENGINEER: SYSKA & HENNESSY. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: ALFRED SCHOLZE & ASSOC. ACOUSTICAL CONSULTANT: MARTIN NEWSON & ASSOC. CONTRACTOR: TASLIMI CONSTRUCTION.

Nickelodeon Animation Studio

Designed by Area

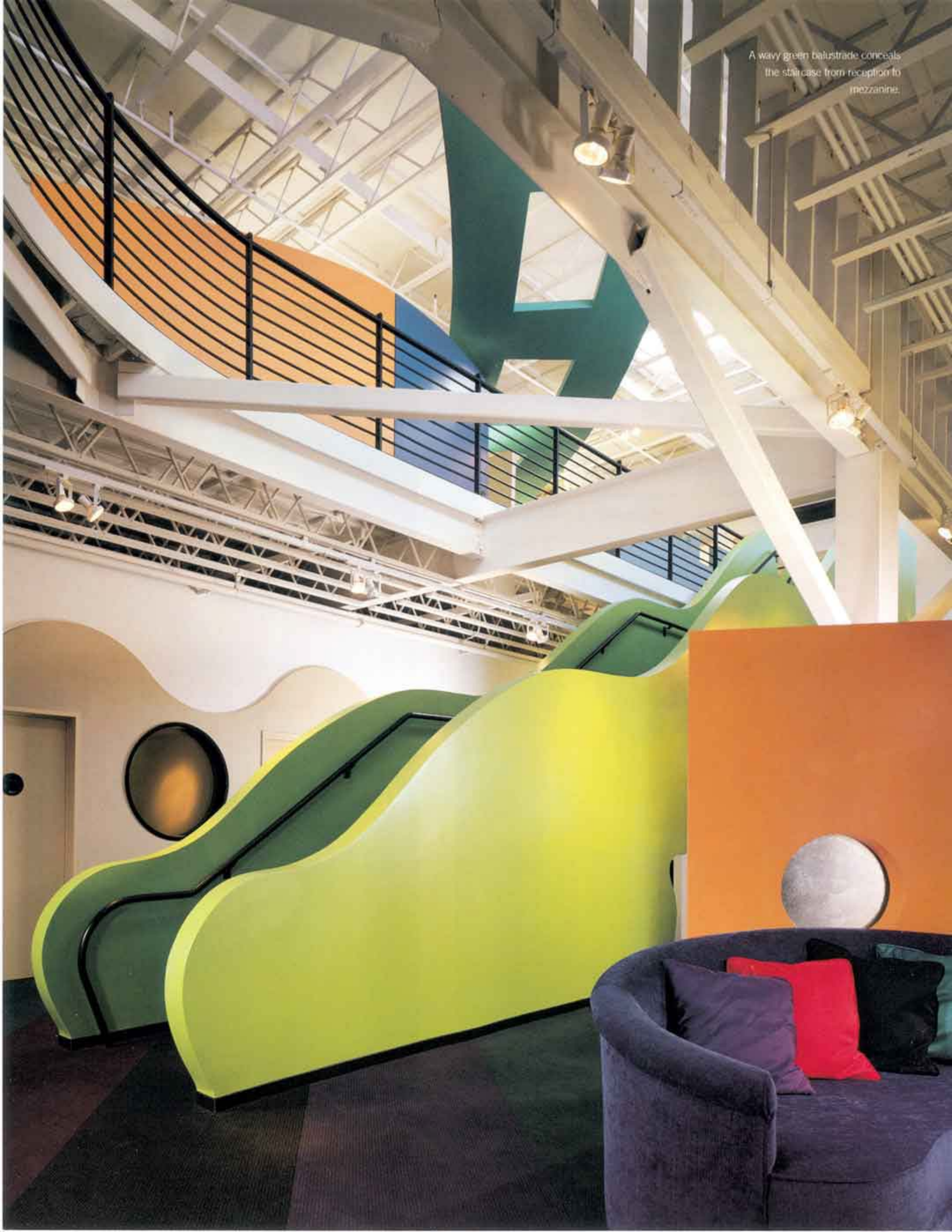
Iwant people to walk in here and know we make cartoons. If it looks like an office, you've failed," was the message from Albie Hecht, Nickelodeon's president of film and TV entertainment. For designers Walt Thomas and Henry Goldston, partners of Area, that was an invitation to transform a former Burbank factory into an explosion of bright colors and inventive shapes. "Nothing is meant to look real, and everything is a little askew," notes Goldston. "We looked at tapes of their cartoons to achieve a distinctive look."

Activities that were formerly scattered were brought under one roof, and morale soared among the 250 animators, whose average age is 25. Area worked closely with Ellen Albert of MTV Networks to devise a facility that was functional and fun. They tied together two large industrial buildings, whitewashing the exposed bow-truss vaults, and inserting a cutaway mezzanine into half of the main building to boost the floor area to 72,000 square feet. Within this space they created a full-height concourse that links a conference room at one end to a theater that doubles as a gym at the other. A green carpet scrolls over the reception desk, an orange screen punched with holes divides the waiting area from an employee lounge that also serves talent attending auditions. A wavy green balustrade conceals the staircase, and the elevator is contained within a purple ovoid tower. Windows to the audition room have bold yellow frames.

Ribbonlike soffits lead into the villagelike clusters of workstations, which open onto little squares that serve as living rooms with comfortable armchairs inspired by the Googie ('50s futurism) era. The eight-foot-square custom-designed workstations contain tilt and rise drawing boards that were fabricated by Knoll. There are five ribbons, each a different color, which define the territory and identity of a production group. Each group is responsible for the development of a feature, from

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A wavy green balustrade conceals the staircase from reception to mezzanine.



ception to completion, thus building a strong sense of collaboration among different fields of expertise. Private offices are interspersed with groups of workstations to avert monotony. They are treated as boxes that stop short of the wall and the openings flood the space with natural light. The designers have incorporated an existing brick hut into the buffer zone between the two buildings, utilizing it as a coffee station.

This is a building that makes you smile—from the billboard facade and surreal miniature golf course in the front yard, to the alternation of waves and angles, circles and triangles in the work area. "Amazingly, it's not overwhelming," says Nickelodeon general manager Mark Taylor, who is also camp director for a bunch of young employees "who work long hours and party a lot. There's a sense of belonging, of comfort and energy," he reports. He is responsible for the constant supply of fresh flowers, fruit, and bagels that make this workplace feel like home, and he applauded the introduction of color gels on the uplights that add another layer of warmth and fun, and a graffiti wall that's crammed with inventions. As Hecht explains: "We involved the artists in the process and, with their feedback, created a playful, inspirational, and cutting-edge job which will hopefully give birth to the next generation of cartoon classics."



Left: A view from the main entrance into the gallery reception. Below: An orange screen punctuated with holes allows reception from all angles and keeps the site more lively, colorful. Right: Reception with and without signage routes of entrances.



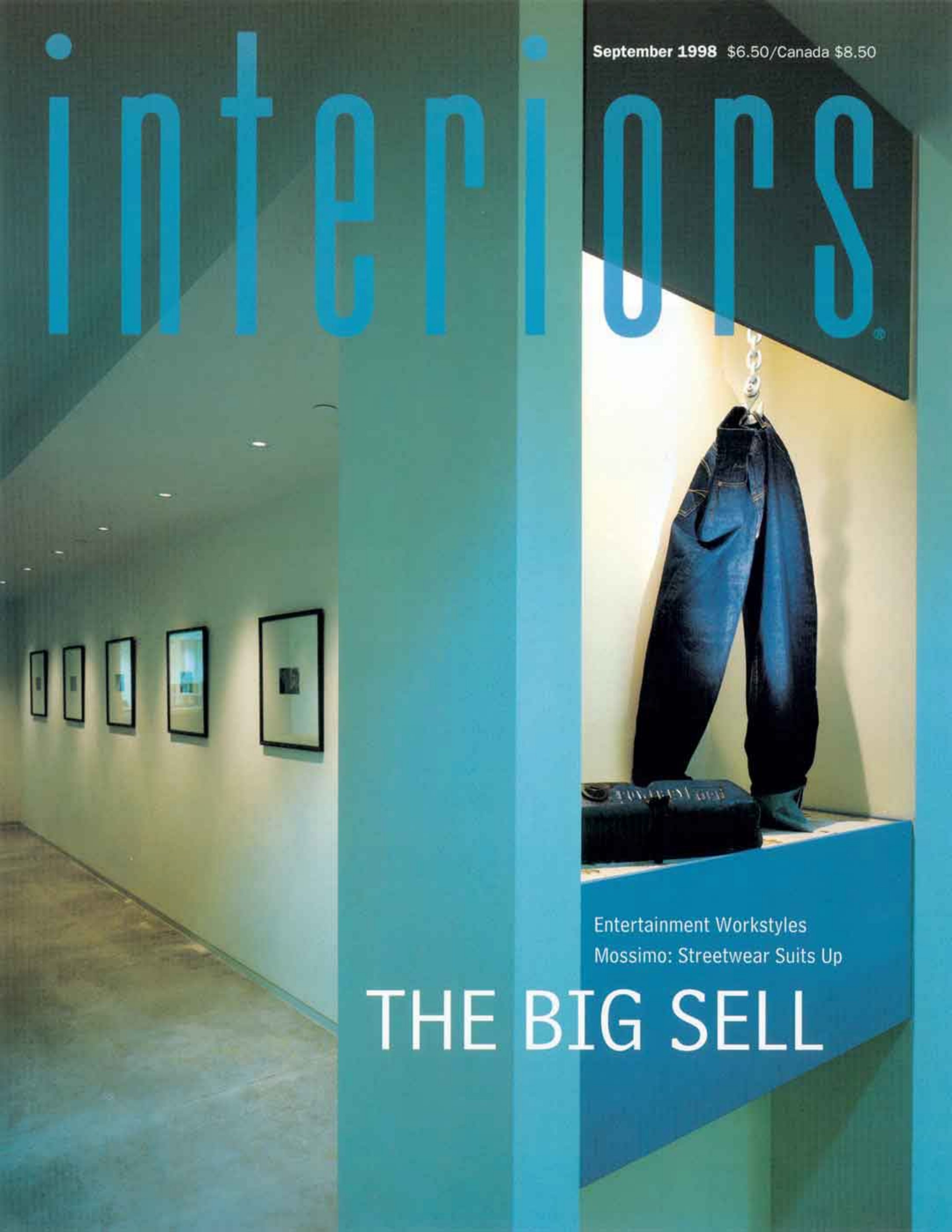
Client: Nickelodeon
 Interior Design: AREA
 Design team: Walt Starnes, Henry Gokstein,
 Kelly Trout Fitter, Brian Schlegel, Susan Armstrong,
 Eleanor Wheeler, Diana Park, Jennifer Park
 Project management: Paramount Studios
 General contractor: Telford Construction
 Lighting consultant: Joe Kaplan
 Acoustic consultant: Merlin Newman
 Furniture dealer: Associated Purchasing
 Engineer: De Anza
 Photography: Jon Miles/Heinrich Bessing



Source: Project Review Series: Seattle, Media District, with
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 Paul & Lambert, L271, Seattle, Murin (Jotbox), with
 text by DesignLife, Architecture, Architecture, part:
 Bentley, James Paul & Lambert, sculpture: Vera
 Mikovics, Seven Brothers, Paramount Studios
 Artist: Seattle, Vera, artist: Knoll, artist: Bentley,
 walkway: Carrigan, Mikovics, Seattle Brothers,
 Golden

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