

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 to the gallery reception. Below: An orange screen punctuated with holes allows reception from all angles and keeps the site secure. 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/Heath Beasing



Source: Project review. Seeing: Media District, with
 fabric by Design/Inc. AcCom. paint: Paul & Lambert.
 Fax cover: Carpet: Bentley. Backcovering: Arden, paint:
 Paul & Lambert. L27: Seating: Muriel (Jotbox), with
 fabric by Design/Inc. AcCom. AcCom. knit carpet:
 Bentley. Jans: Paul & Lambert. sculpture: Vera
 Mikovics. Sema: Boshers, Paramount Studios.
 Neon: Seating: Vera, chairs: Knoll, sofas: Bentley,
 wallcovering: Carrigan, telecabs: Seelye Brothers,
 tables.