

# 33rd annual interiors awards

**Contract Editor in Chief John Czarnecki (right) reviews entries with jurors (standing from left)**

**Primo Orpilla, studio o+a**

**James Prendergast, Goettsch Partners**

**Viveca Bissonnette, Hollander Design Group**

**Carolyn Lu, iu+bilibowicz architects**

**Lance Amato, Conant Architects**

Client  
**Confidential**  
Location  
**Chicago**

By Edward Keegan  
Photography by  
Michelle Litvin



# confidential trading floor

Tree-like columns and curved, wooden soffits reference the tranquility of a forest and offset the chaos often associated with trading.

# Perkins+Will

JURY

**“The big gestures are dramatic. The detailing of the ceiling form is exquisite and unifies the space. It is very different from everything else we have seen here. This has a strong concept throughout the entire space.”**

Twenty-first century trading is hardly the crazed activity that it was during Michael Douglas’s and Charlie Sheen’s 1980s *Wall Street*. For one Chicago trading firm, modern-day trading calls for a 75,000-square-foot office outfitted with a series of individualized spaces and plenty of room providing respite from the flashing computer monitors that show the pulse of the financial world. “We describe it as kinetic, not frenetic,” Perkins+Will project principal Tom Kasznia says. The design firm thus artfully transformed a downtown space—formerly a check-processing facility—into discreet offices that provide workspace for 350 workers.

Those changes start with the reception area where a Zen rock garden introduces the concept that this workplace values tranquility. Its limestone-clad walls are bathed in natural light, and a small pond and waterfall enhance serenity. A 390-foot-long, slightly undulating corridor, clad with modulating simple-but-elegant materials spans the full width of the building. “It’s unusual to be able to see entirely through a space of this size,” Kasznia says.

Twenty-seven columns enclosed in custom-designed gypsum fiber-reinforced casings punctuate three open office areas. The smooth slopes of the sculptural columns reflect the client’s desire to transform the banal structural concrete columns into trees. The client asked, “Couldn’t it be like this?” in a meeting with the designers, while splaying his hands up and outwards. Perkins+Will’s team ran with the idea and a forest metaphor, slightly rotating each of the columns so they appear to be subtly different when viewed across the space. Curving maple veneer soffits above the trading floor reinforce the idea of a woodland, with a variety of direct and indirect

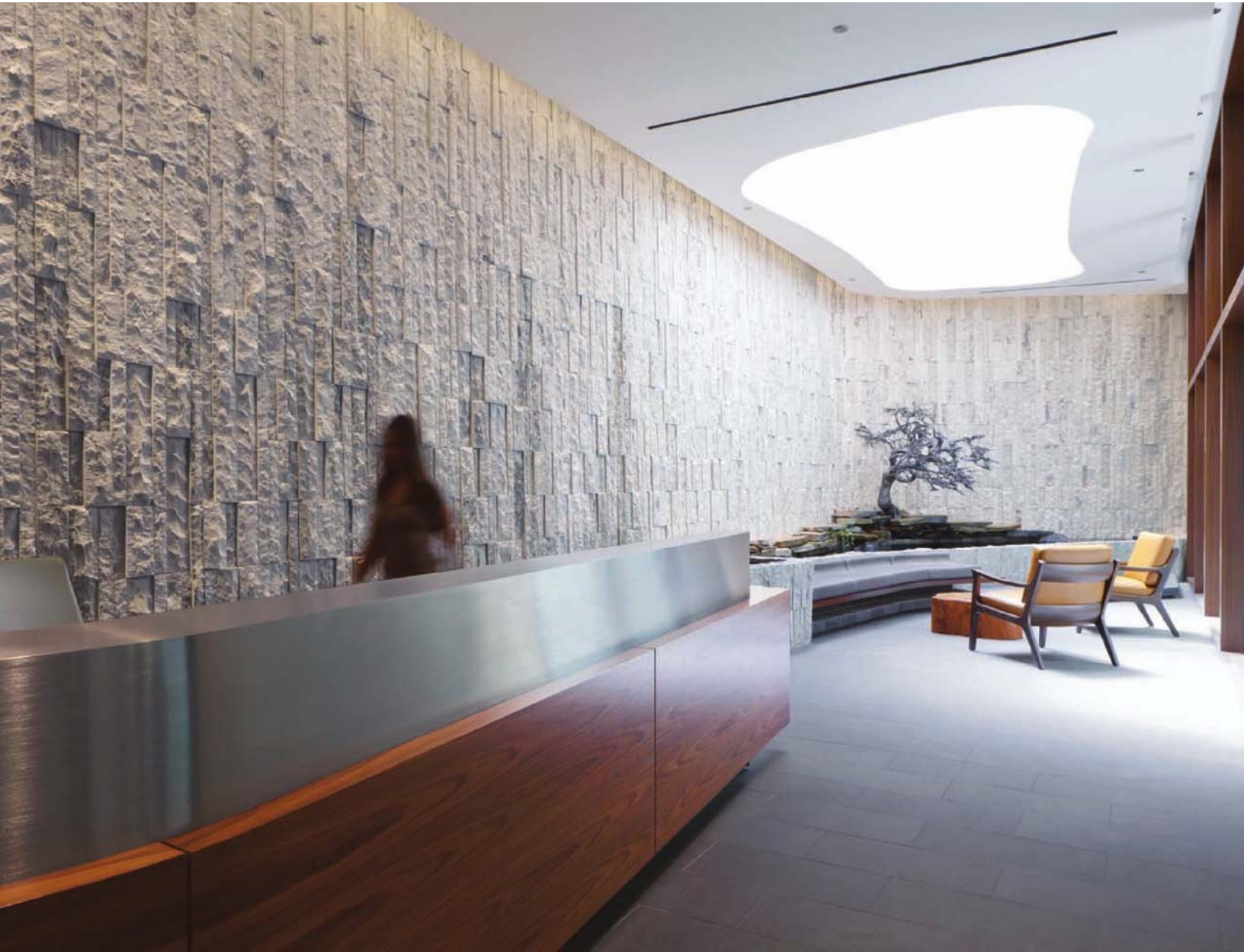
light fixtures keeping the space bright without casting glare on the all-important computer monitors.

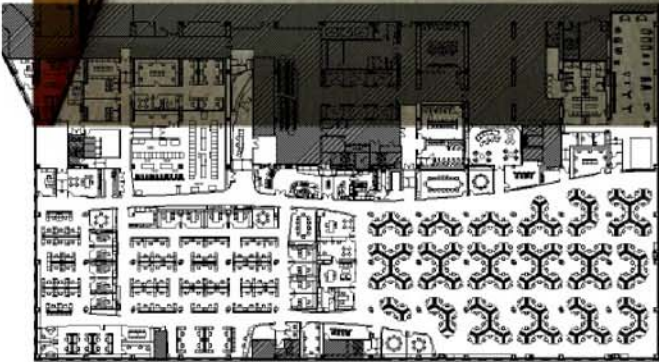
On the eastern half of the floor, a similar open-office setting houses the support staff. The workstations are ample, if considerably smaller than the expansive trading desks. The designers employed small touches—such as colorful mini lampshades—to keep the area from becoming dull. By incorporating the amorphous columns and their accompanying circular ceiling soffits, the space keeps a good deal of the richness found on the trading floor.

“We chose a durable palette,” project manager Tim Wolfe says. Custom jambs, corner guards, and wall panels were fabricated from plate steel. The reception area and main corridor feature dark granite floors. The two corridors that link most of the firm’s spaces have walls that alternate between a mottled Venetian plaster, Paldao wood, and steel panels. Each of the materials is deployed to provide a subdued sense of texture that’s soothing, yet ever-interesting in the changing light, while providing maximum durability.

Just off the trading floor is the fitness center—a full-service facility that has a full-time trainer on-staff. The views from the space are equal to those from the trading floor—and presumably get more attention when employees are working out than when they’re behind a trading desk. Another high-end amenity is the full-service food area that features hot meals during the day and a barista. These small but gracious touches integrate unusual high-end services into the workplace, matching Perkins+Will’s careful design that elevates a place for trading into a deeply humane place to work. **c**

The wooden ceiling unifies the space (right). Limestone walls, a small pond, and a Zen rock garden (below) instill tranquility in the reception area. Small touches—like fun lampshades in a hue reminiscent of classic bankers' lights—keep the space vibrant (opposite).





Floor Plan