

# Boston Business Journal

Friday, June 20, 2008

## The other side of the drafting table

Margulies & Associates has helped a number of clients set up new offices. We look at how it handles its own move

By Mary K. Pratt Special to the Journal

Boston-based architectural firm Margulies & Associates has guided a number of clients through relocations and new office designs. Now the firm is taking on one of its most important moves: its own.

The firm will move into its new space during the fourth weekend in August and expects to be up running on Aug. 25. Anyone who's ever gone through an office move knows the hassles and headaches Margulies has in store. But for an architectural firm,

creating and moving into a new office space goes a little bit beyond making sure the servers are up and the desk drawers don't stick.

"Architects have the extra pressure of being judged by their own space," said principal Marc Margulies.

"We felt a tremendous pressure to make sure what we did would be an appropriate statement about what we are and what we want to be in the future."

But beyond turning its new space into a prime portfolio example, Margulies & Associates' relocation mirrors any number of office moves and presents some tips for getting from Point A to Point B.

Senior management had been considering a move for a few years. The firm has been working from its offices at 234 Congress St. in the Financial District for 15 years, expanding from just one floor to the three it now occupies.

As its current lease was ending, the principals were also marking the firm's 20th anniversary as well as some new commissions that, when taken all together, presented a reason to mark such milestones with a move.



*Christine Law, an associate at architecture and interior design firm Margulies & Associates, is overseeing the design of the new space — formerly occupied by the Children's Museum.*

"In many ways it was an opportunity to make a new statement about who we are not only to our clients but to ourselves as well," said Margulies, whose firm reported \$8.26 million in billings for 2007.

From the start, the principals at Margulies & Associates said knew what they wanted: a location that was close to their existing office and fit their budget yet still had a unique sense of space, said lead designer Christine Law.

After seeing a dozen or so potential sites, Margulies said they found the right spot: the fourth floor of the Boston Children's Museum, located at 300 Congress St. in the Fort Point Channel neighborhood. To many businesspeople, an unfinished space above a tourist spot in an arts-oriented district might seem a stretch. But Margulies principals said that for them, the space is ideal.

"The advantage to the space was that it was raw, it was never used as office space, so everything we were going to do there would be done by us and therefore be an expression of us," Margulies said.

Law said the district is attracting other engineering and architectural firms. Plus, the Children's Museum is a certified by the **U.S. Green Building Council** as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design Gold for its commitment to green standards.

The firm, which will have its own entrance off Congress Street, also gains its own roof deck adjacent to the museum's rooftop garden. It gets a piece of Boston's history, too, as the building dates back to the 1860s.

"One of the criteria for us is the space had to be special," Margulies said. This spot clearly fits that requirement.

To bring that requirement to reality, senior principal Daniel P. Perruzzi Jr. proposed creating two teams -- a three-person design team and a six-member client group.

Law acknowledged that in an architectural firm, there's a building full of experts.

"As you can imagine people have a lot of ideas on what they want their space to be like, not always keeping in mind that we have a budget," she said.

To get ideas, the design team sent out a questionnaire to the staff. It's similar to how the firm approaches its typical clients, asking such questions as how they want to work, how they want to express themselves and how they want the space to feel.

"We spent way more design time on this than our clients would want to pay for. I think we simply explored more design options than would have been the case in most

situations. Because we wanted to make sure we looked at everything," Margulies said.

Construction started this month.

Margulies said the biggest challenge of this project was managing the economics -- like nearly every other company, his firm had to stick to a budget, too. "We have a lot of good ideas but maybe more than we could afford to do," he said.

But now that much of the design process is done and the renovations starting, Margulies expects to move smoothly through the next phase.

"As far as I'm concerned, the pressure is off," he said, explaining that he felt more pressure as all the details were being worked out.

Law said the design process moved along like any other project. The firm would not disclose the overall cost of the relocation, but Margulies said the build-out cost of about \$60 a square foot is about average.

Margulies said the new space will be a "dynamic intersection" of the old mill building's brick-and-beam construction with the crisp clean lines of a modern interior. He said the design calls for glass, stainless steel and bold colors -- the designers are still finalizing the color scheme -- combined with the building's oak beams and columns, the joinery between them and the sandblasted wood ceiling.

Aside from the aesthetics, Margulies said there are business benefits from the new space.

First off, the move will enable the firm's 50 employees as well as the 10 workers at the related **Corporate Project Partners** Inc., a project management and relocation planning company, to stay together on one floor -- always a plus for inspiring collaboration.

Also, the new space, at 13,000 square feet, is 1,000 square feet bigger than the firm's old site, allowing for more meeting areas, a gallery area and future expansion, Margulies said.

And, of course, there's the business value of being able to point to one's own work, Margulies said, highlighting everything from the visual design to the green elements that will be incorporated into the office when it's set for move-in later this summer.

"Our space has to be a showcase for the clients," said Law.

That's an important point for design firms, said Leland Cott, FAIA, co-founding principal of Bruner/Cott & Associates in Cambridge and an adjunct professor of urban design at **Harvard University's** Graduate School of Design.

"We very much see our own space as an extension of who we are," said Cott, whose firm moved into a building it bought and renovated 15 years ago.

Like Margulies & Associates, Cott said he and principal Simeon Bruner felt pressure to create a space that met the employees' work needs as well as one that could serve as a prime portfolio piece.

"It would be hard for a client to hire a firm whose own work space didn't have excitement," Cott said, noting that the dramatic, open design of his firm's own space has won over clients. "Clients come and say, 'This is the firm I want working for me.'"

While designers said the final product is important for clients to see and appreciate, Margulies and others said the relocation experience itself hasn't taught them any new lessons. It just reaffirms the approach they've always taken.

"The folks here have been doing this for a long time. They know the challenges that come up, and they understand the frustrations and difficulties," said Heather Ukstins, the firm's marketing director. "But going through this process does just make it a little more personal."