

# Boston Business Journal

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## Modern design gives no quarter to corner offices

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Whether it's the economic times we live in, or the increasingly collaborative style in corporate circles, the CEO's corner office often isn't what it used to be.

More and more, luxurious décor is giving way to an office fully visible through floor-to-ceiling glass fronts, with furniture similar to the pieces in staff workstations and a "one size fits all" space for anyone who rates a separate office.

"The days of wood paneling and custom furniture seem to be gone, or at least on hold right now," said Vern Rich, a managing director at Shawmut Design and Construction Co., which constructs high-end commercial interiors.

"In a nutshell, companies are trying to narrow the gap by scaling back on finishes in the CEO offices," said Rich. "The outer perimeter for executive offices is still the norm, but increasingly common areas like cafes and gyms are on the perimeter, too, to give something there to the general staff."

Other companies headed in this direction include the advertising firm Hill Holliday, which moved from Hancock Tower to Boston's financial district last year. In the new location, CEO Mike Sheehan and firm President Karen Kaplan have glass offices that are smaller than their previous digs.

Law firm Bingham McCutchen also moved last year to One Federal Street, where their mostly glass-front offices are still considered unusual in legal circles.

For some years, technology firms such as Eze Castle Software have adopted workstation "pods" with several employees clustered together. Eze Castle has pods of workstations that allow for the free flow of conversation and brainstorming. Only 10 people at Eze Castle have offices, CEO Tom Gavin previously told the BBJ.

When the Shawmut firm remodelled a floor at its headquarters in 560 Harrison Ave., Rich was located with three other executives in a workstation pod surrounded by staff work areas. "We're in the middle, out in the open," he said.

Boston-based **Oxford Bioscience Partners** had **Margulies Perruzzi Architects** design its 16th-floor offices on Berkeley Street with both exterior and interior walls of glass throughout. Staffers can see right through the executive offices to the Back Bay views outside.

Managing Partner Jonathan Fleming, who works out of a see-through corner office, said the venture capital firm agreed to create a workplace culture that breeds, in his words, “a ‘we’re in this together’ atmosphere.”

“Rather than inspire fear, we wanted to create an office atmosphere in which people come in whether it’s to share a big success or a big problem,” said Fleming. “The all-glass walls may be a little extreme for most people, but the partners universally agreed we wanted an open-door policy. With glass, you can’t hide behind your door and not be available and accessible.”

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