



## DESIGNER FORUM

A NYC-based communications firm features flooring that speaks the language of the city.

■ By Jeff Knoll

Investment firm Initiative's lobby features TecCrete flooring.

Most New York office relocations are all about real estate efficiencies and cost reductions. However, for a media planning, buying and investment firm named Initiative, which moved out of its old space on the quiet Upper East Side to relocate to bustling Herald Square, reducing costs was only part of the story. There is a tale of a complete rethinking of the way they collaborate and work, and a re-imagining of how their physical space could reflect their energetic corporate culture.

For its new headquarters, the firm adopted an unassigned desk policy, providing an opportunity for the Ted Moudis Associates' design team to create a wide variety of work settings throughout. Staff could choose to work at a desk within their "neighborhood" or take their laptop and move to a huddle room, open team area, private phone booth or communal quiet room, with a "clean desk" policy in place to ensure that employees clear their personal items from whatever space they have been occupying and return them to their assigned locker at the end of each day.

### INSPIRED BY LOCAL AESTHETICS

Although Initiative, part of Interpublic Group (IPG), is a global

company, the Ted Moudis team chose New York City as its design inspiration for creating a new youthful and dynamic workplace that, like the city, buzzes with energy. Stepping out of the elevator into the bright yellow lobby, the energy is palpable. The floor is covered with Mats Inc.'s Floorazzo Marble neon yellow terrazzo tiles, and the walls are painted to match. The predominant feature in the reception/coffee bar are the wall tiles printed with Keith Haring artwork that sprawl across the expansive ceiling and immediately set the bold tone of the agency.

The counterpart to the bold ceiling is the concrete flooring. Like the sidewalks covering New York outside, concrete Haworth TecCrete raised access floors fill the vast 90,000-square-foot space. Although the tiles are aesthetically





The beer garden has a pebbled floor framed by Interface's Super Flor carpet tile.

pleasing, the selection was made primarily as a cost-saving measure. The existing raised flooring in the space was damaged and many areas needed to be replaced. So rather than investing in new standard floor tiles with new carpet, it was determined that it would be more cost effective to utilize new concrete floor tiles and forego the carpet. This decision provided the main aesthetic for the space. The client was alerted to the acoustic issues inherent in utilizing a concrete floor, and mock-ups were created to simulate conditions.

### BOLD COLORS POINT THE WAY

There are exceptions to the concrete floor, and they are colorful. Open team meeting areas located within each team "neighborhood" are designed with bold colors to act as wayfinding devices within the "free-address" office environment. Hot pink 1st Avenue carpet tile by Interface appears in one team area with complementary pink paint, upholstery and pink camouflage wallpaper. Similar team rooms occur in blue, orange and yellow at other locations. The design team took advantage of the raised floor by implementing loose pebbles into portions of the meeting areas to create a more zen atmosphere within the color blocking.

The use of pebbles within the raised floor creates a totally different atmosphere for the beer garden. (Yes, there is a beer garden!) Here, the pebbles, submerged in an epoxy,

immediately recall an outdoor park, and the garden tables and chairs complete the ambiance. The intent was to reference the outdoor park across the street at Herald Square.

The beer garden's main floor is a green textured Interface Super Flor carpet tile, which instantly recalls grass. The adjacent wood benches—a homage to the iconic High Line park on Manhattan's West Side—help to complete the outdoor vibe.

In contrast, the bar area itself switches gears with matte black Lonstage MT sheet vinyl flooring by Lonseal for a more slick, intimate feeling. The black beaded chandeliers complement the flooring.

Green carpet was used throughout all of Initiative's shared spaces. For example, the floor in the communal area known as The Pit welcomes staff to crash on an over-scaled pillow of \$100 bills or to sit casually on the stained strand board tiered seating. Half of the space is sunken, creating an amphitheater setting for company-wide town hall meetings, working lunches and presentations. Again, the green carpet is used to indicate a shared space, and the various green hues of cushions,



The elevator lobby and reception area features Floorazzo Marble terrazzo tiles by Mats Inc.



garden seating and ivy wallpaper create a park-like atmosphere. The exposed light bulbs, which span the space, recall the canopy of Broadway marquees. Staff can sit at tables or bars and grab a magazine from the newsstands that flank the pit.

## DIVERSITY GATHERS HERE

Perhaps the most dramatic area is The Grandstand. Inspired by the grandstands that line Herald Square during the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, a New York City institution, the design team created its own grandstand with oversized tiered seating. The space overlooks Herald Square and is suitable for small group gatherings, individual quiet work, large town hall gatherings and even musical concerts. The random Oriental rugs that wrap each seat recall the rugs used by nearby street vendors for their daily prayers as well as the many local carpet shops in the neighborhood. They also create a playful, bazaar-like atmosphere that highlights diversity.

Exterior corner spaces that offer great views of Herald Square are lined with area rugs created with Interface Flor black



The Pit with Interface Super Flor carpet tile.

and white patterned floor tiles, and accented with a bright yellow sofa. Looking out at the streets below, those in the space can see the black and white striped pattern in the crosswalk, highlighted with bright yellow taxicabs.

Linking the open neighborhoods is The Gallery. Since employees don't have assigned desks, this open meeting space provides a place for the staff to display and share personal effects with one another. Like the city streets plastered with posters and flyers, it is ever-changing, dynamic and interactive. Employees hang photos of their friends and family, drawings by their children and inspirational images. The entire project team created this low-tech clothespin design at the completion of the project. The ceiling over the gallery contains a large billboard with the over-scaled text displaying the company's mantra, Fast Bold Decisive Simple (FBDS). Grounding all the visual noise is a simple black carpet "street."

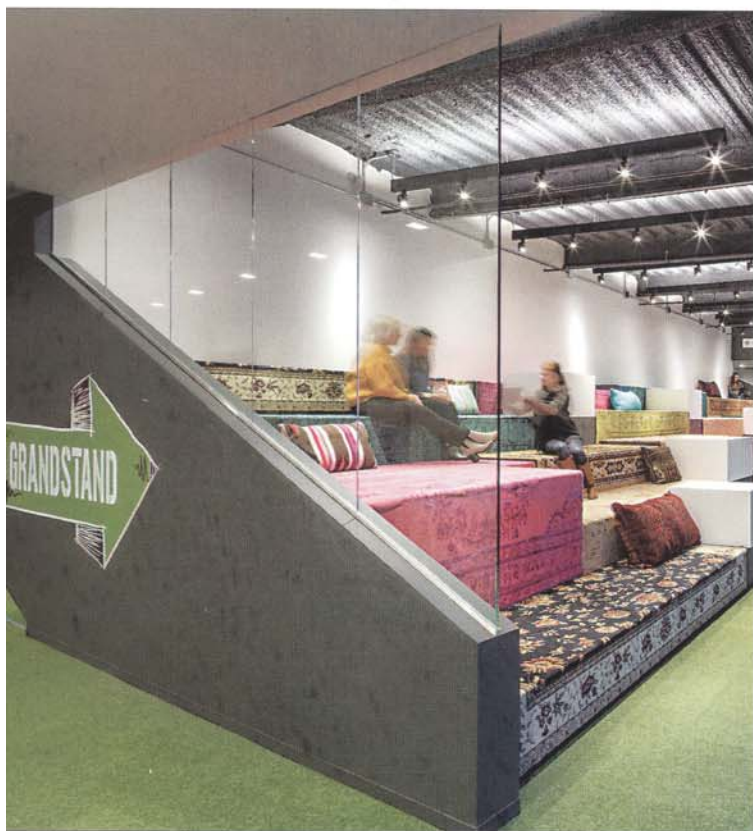
## RE-IMAGINATION IS A SUCCESS

Ultimately, the space is built for the people who occupy it. Judged by that standard, Initiative's workplace re-imagining has been a smashing success. Post-occupancy surveys conducted by the design team indicated that 90% of Initiative's employees prefer the new workspace over the previous office, and an overwhelming 97% said the new environment featured an improved design aesthetic. ■



### THE AUTHOR

Jeff Knoll is a senior associate and design director at Ted Moudis Associates in New York, New York, where he has worked since 2010. Knoll holds a bachelor's degree in architecture from Penn State University and lives in Manhattan.



The Grandstand wraps steps with Oriental rugs for casual seating.