



## **Montroy Architecture and MMB Contractors finish Publicis' HQ**

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Photo credit: Ola Wilk

Philadelphia, PA The project team of designer Montroy Architecture (MA) and contractor MMB Contractors has completed construction of a three-floor U.S. headquarters office of Publicis Groupe's health division at the 130-year-old Bourse Building in the Center City neighborhood.

Paris-based Publicis Groupe, which is one of the largest and oldest advertising and public relations companies in the world, recently relocated its health and wellness arm to the Bourse after outgrowing its old space in the nearby Wannamaker Building.

"The 40,000 s/f office in Philadelphia is MA's second project for Publicis. Our firm also recently designed 25,000 s/f offices for Kekst CNC, another Publicis subsidiary, at 437 Madison Ave. in Manhattan," said Montroy Architecture principal Daniel Montroy, AIA. "MA began working on the Philadelphia project when Publicis' executives and employees were establishing their post-pandemic return-to-office routines, and the goal was to make the transition to a new, shared work environment as easy as possible. Reflecting this, the design incorporates multiple social areas and comfortable, hospitality-inspired elements."

The Bourse Building, located at 111 South Independence Mall East, is a Beaux Arts office property from the 1890s, designed by G.W. & D.W. Hewitt for George E. Bartol, a grain and commodities exporter. The property originally served as a commodities exchange and is one of the first steel-framed buildings in PA. It features a full-height central atrium that allows natural light into Publicis' offices and houses a public food court on the ground floor.

The landlord during the lease agreement and construction was MRP Realty. Lupert-Adler Real Estate Funds and Keystone Development and Investment have since acquired the property.

The project team assisted Publicis early on, prior to lease signing, while the space selection was still ongoing. MA's designers reviewed shortlisted spaces for functionality and helped with lease negotiations, while MMB's construction personnel evaluated the constructability, available building systems and pre-existing conditions.

Photo credit: Ola Wilk

### A Versatile Design Aimed at Attracting Employees Back to the Office

"Publicis' new office represents a significant change in the company's workplace strategy. The new space has a smaller footprint and offers employees a hybrid work model, so our team focused on

accommodating these changes through increased number of social spaces, hospitality- and residential-inspired design elements, and increased flexibility in both space design and furniture selection. The same time, we maintained the sense of the company's culture through branding, color selection and organizing the space for teams working on specific clients," shared MA Project Manager Sarah A. Bigos.

The new buildout at The Bourse includes a private entrance, dedicated outdoor patio and elevator lobby along with space on parts of the first floor, an entire fifth floor and a partial sixth floor. Instead of private desks, workers are hotdesking.

That users and guests enter the space through a private, first-floor entrance leading to a lounge and club area, where Publicis entertains clients and employees can work or relax. The lounge features a long, wooden bar with yellow accent panels and brass footrests, a white marble countertop, green porcelain tiles around an arched inset for shelves behind the bar, and dark wooden bar stools with forest green upholstery.

A long wooden table, white upholstered lounge chairs and red leather wingback chairs help round out the main seating area, which also features custom-designed wooden shelving and wall panels, and a mix of original and reproduced plaster moldings along the walls and ceiling beams. The bar serves coffee during the day and drinks in the evenings, and the private patio out front has tables for outdoor socializing and events.

Aged wood plank flooring reinforces the vintage feel of the club, which features a modern seating area in the back. The rear of the space is a media lounge and library, with two tufted, leather couches facing each other in front of a multi-panel LED screen, which can be used for meetings, presentations or playing videos during an event. A new private glass vestibule connects the lounge to a private, Publicis-dedicated elevator, which takes guests to the company's workspace on the fifth and sixth floors.

"During demolition of the first floor space, construction crews discovered original plaster crown moldings and floor trims as well as a blacked out window," said MA Job Captain Thomas Yeh. "Publicis, MA and the landlord decided to preserve those details and even reconstruct the ceiling in the back of the first floor lounge to match the original ceiling over the bar and cafe area. The initial design for suspended ceilings in the lounge was abandoned in order to showcase the discovered original look in an architectural nod to the building's history.

Upstairs, on the fifth floor, MA focused on the flexible work mandate and developed a floor plan with a mix of workstation areas, lounge seating and meeting rooms ranging small two-person meeting rooms to boardrooms that can seat 30 and a multifunctional café that can serve as a meeting and company-wide teleconference spot for hundreds of participants. "To increase flexibility, we selected furniture systems that are fluid and movable," explained Bigos. The hallways feature several social areas for informal meetings and work, such as a mini-lounge with a mid-century, yellow leather couch and two black leather armchairs arranged in front of a wall of windows overlooking the atrium.

The floor plans include dedicated work areas for each of Publicis internal single client-focused agencies along the narrow ends of the building, each of which has its own color scheme.

On the fifth floor, desk areas are arranged around a massive pantry and cafe, which is outfitted with a long, white bar, custom-built dark gray cabinetry hosting a coffee machine and other appliances, white cafe tables and a mix of yellow and black chairs. Like much of this floor, the ceiling and ductwork are exposed and painted white, and long, horizontal LED light fixtures by Prudential Lighting help brighten the space. In keeping with the desire to preserve some historical elements, some areas feature the building's original exposed brick walls. One brick-walled meeting area with floor-to-ceiling glass doors includes a hand-painted sign with an arrow announcing "free library." Both sides of the fifth floor office connect in the center via an original internal bridge suspended over the atrium's food court.

Ultimately, preserving the historic elements helped save money in both the first-floor lounge and work spaces, as an alternative to building those areas from scratch with new materials.

The light fixtures are contemporary in design, and were selected to offer a visual contrast to the exposed brick or original moldings. In meeting areas, that might mean a suspended, circular LED disk, or in the downstairs lounge, it meant suspended glass globe lamps and circular LED strip lights of varying sizes. The project features tubular Pru1 Linear, 2" linear BionicPro2 and Gaze Soft Edge round lighting fixtures, all by Prudential Lighting.

Many of the conference rooms include nearly floor-to-ceiling glazing along the walls to let in natural light. In many cases, the glass wall panels look out over the building's internal glass atrium, which cuts through all nine floors and features a large skylight, allowing sunlight into the inward-facing offices. Some of the glazed conference rooms feature wooden slat acoustical panels along the ceiling for sound dampening, with built in horizontal LED light fixtures.

Rounding out the fifth floor is a broadcast room for interoffice video production, broadcasting, postproduction and editing. The space is soundproofed and features bleacher-style seating for meetings.

Upstairs on the sixth floor are more work spaces, including meeting rooms, as well as a smaller, more stylish kitchen and cafe area. The café's rounded alcove with a bright yellow/golden wall offers a spot for casual meetings or eating lunch on a green velvet banquette, with square, wooden black cafe tables and black chairs. Geometric black-and-white tiles cover the floor and the sides of the bar in the kitchen, which also has a polished, black marble countertop and black cabinetry for appliances and storage. Golden bar chairs and suspended glass bulb lights help add trendy touches to the pantry. More shared spaces are located on this floor, including wellness and lactation rooms, lounge areas and phone booths.

Specified by MA, the furniture package was supplied by Creative Office Resources (COR). "Workstations are combination of fixed height and height adjustable desks by AIS and



Workspace48. The majority of ancillary furniture is BluDot with addition of Poppin pieces. Tables are by Nucraft and OFS Kintra, phone booths by Zenbooth, and conference tables are AIS Calibrate,” said COR Vice President Scott De Santis. “The ground floor space features a mixture of lounge furniture by Arhaus, West Elm, Pottery Barn, Bright Chair, and custom-fabricated millwork.”

In addition to Daniel Montroy, Sarah Bigos and Thomas Yeh, Montroy Architecture’s team included designer Jessica Gross, AIA, technical designer Adithi Vellimana and job captain Tammy Huang.

Additional project team members included MEP engineer Bala Engineers, furniture supplier Creative Office Resources, partition supplier Lewis Stevenson Office Solutions, and lighting manufacturer Prudential Lighting.

### Construction challenges and solutions

The project’s construction started with demolition of pre-existing interiors, which, unsurprisingly for a building that old, uncovered previously unknown historical elements. When construction crews began gutting the first floor, they discovered original plaster details along the floors and ceilings.

According to MMB’s Project Manager and Chief Estimator Zach Sette. “The building’s higher floors also featured unexpected conditions such as a significant number of unmapped piping, electrical wires, and other infrastructure. The MMB team quickly addressed these discoveries, mainly by either removing or rerouting those elements. In several locations, however, they represented a major challenge, as some of these installations served a healthcare tenant in an adjacent space and could not be shut down. In those cases, MA’s designers and the construction team implemented creative solutions, such as incorporating wood slat ceilings to cover up the existing infrastructure.”

“Access to work areas presented another logistical challenge,” said MMB’s owner and president Marek Maj. “For a period of time, our crews didn’t have access to the freight elevator, which created difficulties for materials deliveries. To address this, the project management team developed alternative solutions, such as hand deliveries via stairs, a limited use of smaller passenger elevators with temporary wall protections and even removing a section of glazing on the fifth and sixth floors to use a tri-axle crane to deliver larger elements such as oversized piping and ductwork, drywall and studs.”

Due to the healthcare tenant operating in an adjacent space, the team was limited in periods when noisy activities could take place. In order to limit disruptions to healthcare operations, MMB scheduled demolition and other loud work in early mornings and on weekends.

Because of the building’s age and previous work, some of the concrete floor slabs on the upper floors developed a significant slope, creating a difference of up to three inches in some cases. MMB corrected it prior to proceeding with installation of new interiors.

In several instances, the construction team benefitted from the building owner’s supportive approach to the project. “The fourth floor was unoccupied during our work. The landlord, which at the time was

MRP Realty, was very accommodating and allowed us to use the unoccupied space for staging and materials storage. This alleviated some of the issues we had with the site access,” shared Sette.

As part of the fit-out, MMB significantly upgraded the HVAC system throughout the space. The contractor installed approximately 70 variable airflow (VAF) units to allow for personalized climate control in small zones as well as two new HVAC systems on the first floor, which are hidden in the lounge’s ceiling. To serve the MDF/IT/low voltage -room, MMB installed three mini-split units.

Other historic elements that required repairs were the brick pier walls on the fifth and sixth floors. Upon removing gypsum board walls during demolition, the crews discovered that sections of walls were previously repaired and filled in with unattractive concrete masonry units (CMUs). As these walls played an important interior design role, the project team decided to restore them. This called for a search for brick matching the original color and dimensions. The team eventually selected Columbia Smooth brick from Diener Brick Company.

The “aging” of the new brick to match the original piers material called for experimentation and creativity. “We have tested applying several processes to the brick in order to make it look older and fit the aesthetic a little better. We tried limewashing and spreading grout and plaster. Ultimately, we ended up covering the new brick with a small amount of plaster mix and then scratching it off to give the surface an older brick look,” said Sette.

According to John Stevenson, Vice President at Lewis Stevenson Office Solutions, the piers also called for innovative solutions during installation of Pure 54 glazed privacy partitions by Planet Partitioning and Lewis Stevenson. “Securing our systems directly to the existing brick walls in several locations called for modifying the surface of the walls at the point of connection. From a technical standpoint, it created some challenges, but the same time resulted in a beautiful and clean aesthetic,” he said.

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