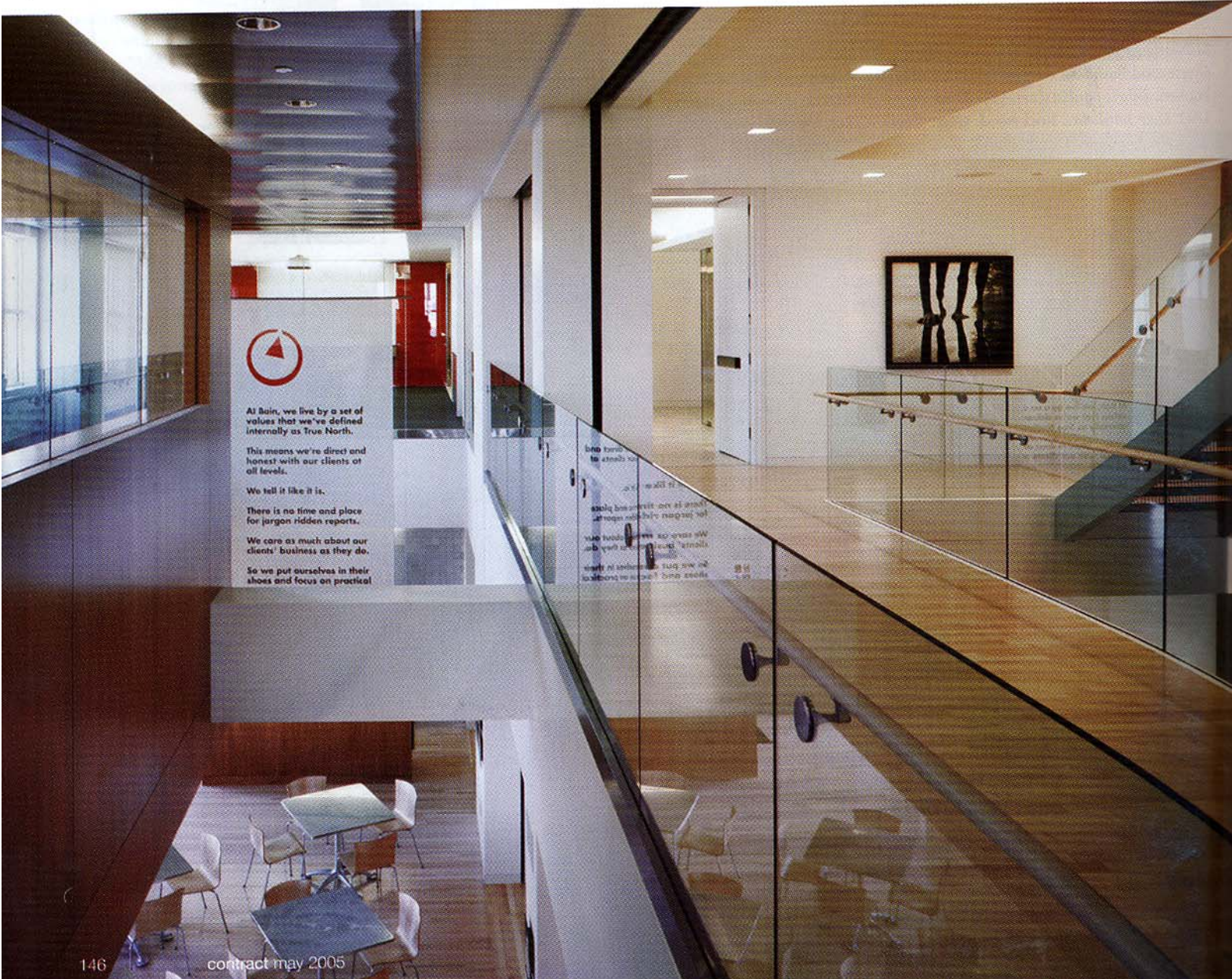


# inspiration from within

For the new Boston headquarters of Bain & Company, Gensler looked beyond aesthetics and into the inner processes of its client, creating a space that's truly its own

By Katie Weeks  
Photography by Timothy Soar



Is it possible for a new office space to be more than just a state-of-the-art place to do business? Can it really be a living piece of the company instead of just a place to plug in? According to the response to the new, Gensler-designed Boston headquarters of management consultancy Bain & Company, the answer is a resounding “yes.”

When a lease expiration precipitated the company’s move, Bain & Co. knew immediately that it wanted a space that reflected the company inside and out. Initially, Gensler came on board to examine workplace strategy and Bain & Co.’s values in relation to real estate possibilities. “We knew we wanted someone early in the process while we were choosing the building because we wanted to make sure it would meet our needs for what we were ultimately trying to do with the space,” says Gerard du Toit, partner at Bain & Co.

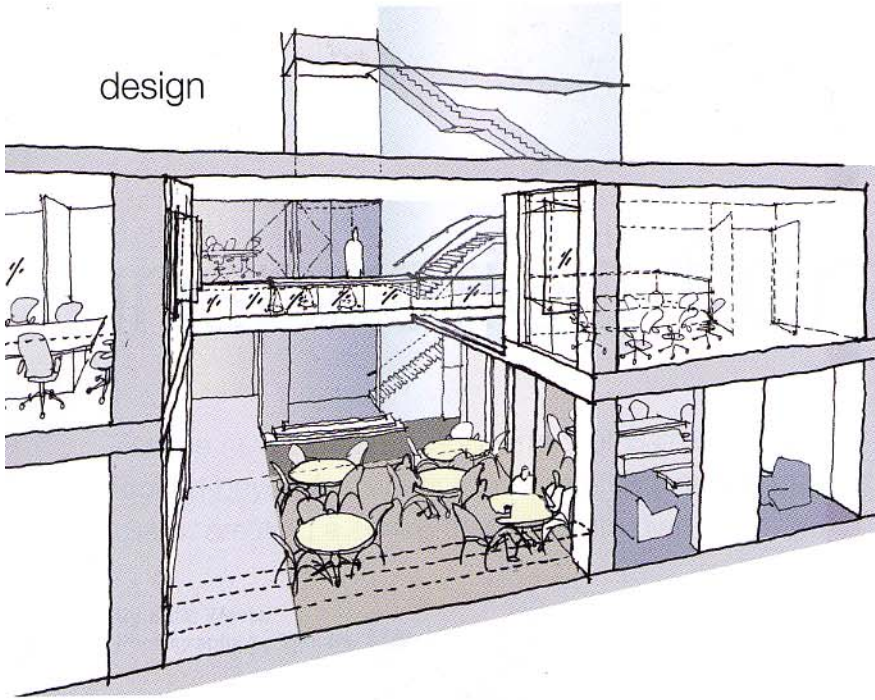
Getting to know the firm and its core values greatly impacted site selection. “They’re not a downtown, business district company. They’re more of an academic, collegial company. They wanted to be in the Back Bay in a low building that has an architectural vocabulary to it,” says Tom Vecchione, principal and design director at Gensler. So, instead of moving into a slick, downtown high-rise, the company settled on a low rise, 11-floor building with an undulating perimeter. For most companies, Vecchione admits, the building could be unorthodox. “At first glance, you’d almost say, ‘Wow, this is one of those odd buildings that you would never go near,’” he says. “But because we learned so much about them through the research process and were able to do some testing and studies to know what their values are, we found that some of the unorthodox things in typical building studies turned to work in their favor.”

The building’s unique qualities, it turns out, played directly into the design needs. To identify the must-have attributes of the new headquarters, Gensler used research-based design tools including interviews with senior leadership, focus groups with each of the company’s disciplines, on-site observation, and employee surveys to investigate Bain & Co.’s organization, work processes, and relationships. The goal was to craft not just a functional and beautiful space, but also to create a home for the company that was a true embodiment of its values.

Creating an open space that fostered informal interaction was key for Bain & Company’s new headquarters. As a result, a glass-paneled staircase links four floors (opposite) and descends into a two-story atrium (right), where a cafe serves as a locale for town hall-style meetings.



design



To accentuate Bain & Co.'s commitment to culture, the space is designed as a backdrop to the company's art collection, which is showcased on each floor (below).



“What the design process enabled and forced us to do was look even deeper within our firm and ourselves to clarify what our culture is, what parts are most important, and what parts the physical design of the office could most help, reinforce, and further build,” says du Toit. One example, he notes, is how Bain & Co.’s core values of being open, honest, and direct in its work translate into the new space. “We made the floorplan as open as possible, with as few walls as possible,” he explains. “In offices, all of the walls are glass so that you can see through them. You can see people and there are no barriers.”

Fostering informal interaction and playing in to Bain & Co.’s commitment to connectivity was also key. “As a management consulting firm, people are out of the office a lot. When they’re in the office, the culture needs to encourage and support non-planned interactions,” says Arlyn Vogelmann, a senior associate and workplace strategist at Gensler. To do this, the design team anchored the space with a four-story stairwell.

“Architecturally, you often look at how people connect on a floor, but don’t look between floors vertically. Because they were distributed over four floors, we needed to connect between them,” says Vecchione. “We wanted to migrate the stairs away from being something that was iconic and architectural in the reception area. We wanted to use it as a tool versus using it as a image.” To do so, the designers moved the stairwell deeper into the core of the building and established it as an employee hub. As a result, it is visually and spatially open between the floors, and bottoms into a two-story atrium around which service functions (a café, the library, travel services, client meeting rooms, and a lounge) are situated to encourage interaction. The atrium also serves as a venue for monthly town hall-style meetings for Bain & Co.’s 500 employees.

“It’s worked extremely well,” says du Toit. “Because we have this central connection and reasons to go to the same place, there are random interactions, catching up, and sharing of ideas. There’s a collegiality there that’s enabled by the space.”

Natural light was another must. "In their old space, they didn't have a lot of access to natural light. Having great views and access to windows were major criteria," says Vogelmann. The new floorplan, she notes, is not as deep as that of the old space, allowing for a greater amount of light.

The company's values—authenticity, directness, honesty—also played into the material palette. "It is a prime example of the attachment of strategy with design. We didn't just say 'This is a beautiful palette,' and we didn't just make an aesthetic choice," Vecchione notes. "All of the ideas for the aesthetic really came from the strategic work we'd done." As a result, "the materials themselves are all about simple, authentic, honest use. The clear sightlines and open floors are about transparency in the organization, as is the use of glass and the opportunities for people to engage." Likewise, to accentuate Bain & Co.'s commitment to culture, the space is designed to be a backdrop to the company's art collection.

During periodic company-wide meetings, employees can gather in the cafe or observe from the balcony above (right). Small accents like an apple green wall in an interior office signify the company's sense of humor and mirth (below).



At Bain, we live by a set of values that we've defined internally as True North.

This means we're direct and honest with our clients at all levels.

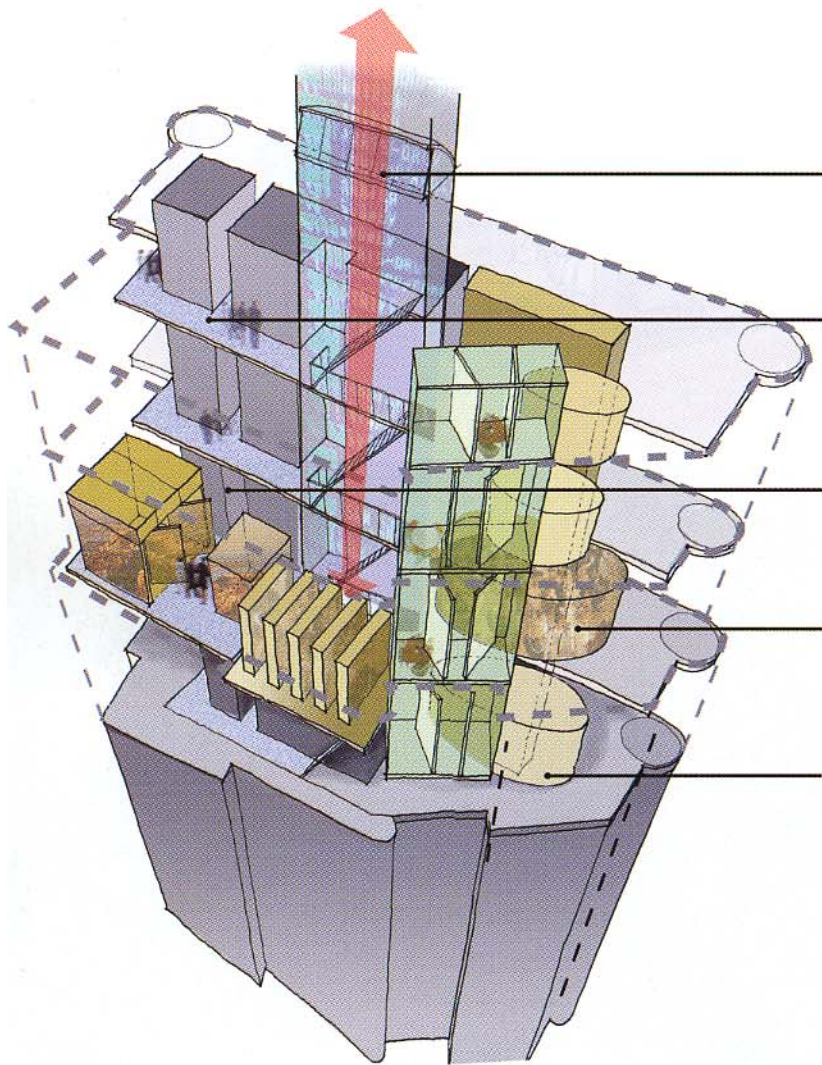
We tell it like it is.

There is no time and place for jargon ridden reports.

We care as much about our clients' business as they do.

So we put ourselves in their shoes and focus on practical actions that get results.





who

*Project, client:* Bain & Company. *Architect, interior designer:* Gensler; Doug Gensler, principal/project director; Arlyn Vogelmann, workplace strategist/project manager; Tom Vecchione, design director; Victoria Tentler-Krylov, Christine Ruffley, designers; Mark Bernstein, technical director; Ali Reza, job captain; Larry Donnell-Kilmer, detailing; Jane Rufo, Pearl Pyo, furniture; Jamie Martin, detailing. *Structural engineer:* MacNamara/Salvia. *Mechanical/electrical engineer:* R.G. Vanderweil Engineers. *General contractor:* Structure Tone. *Lighting designer:* Available Light. *Audio visual:* MCSI. *Furniture dealer:* Office Resources. *Photographer:* Tim Soar.

what

*Wallcoverings:* Carnegie. *Paint:* Benjamin Moore. *Laminate:* Pionite, Formica. *Dry wall:* New England Finish. *Stone flooring and wall detail:* Stone Source. *Wood flooring:* Becht Flooring. *Carpet/carpet tile:* Shaw, Durkan. *Carpet fiber:* Ultron. *Carpet backing:* Action Back, Cushion Back. *Ceiling:* Armstrong, Ceilings Plus, Decoustics. *Lighting:* Neoray, Louis Poulsen, Metalux, Linear. *Doors, door hardware, glass, window frame/wall systems:* Unifor. *Window treatments:* MechoShade. *Railings:* Julius Blum. *Workstations, private offices, files, workstations/private offices/general/conference seating:* Knoll. *Client conference room seating:* Keilhauer, Spinneybeck. *Conference stack chairs:* Stylex. *Conference room tables:* Krug. *Boardroom tables:* Knoll Studio. *Lobby tables, seating:* HBF. *Whiteboard:* Egan Visual. *Café tables, seating, lounge chairs, bar stools:* Knoll Studio. *Café dividing screens:* ICF. *Shelving, architectural woodworking, cabinetmaking, planters/accessories:* North American Woodworking. *Signage:* Advanced Signing. *Elevators:* Fujitsu. *HVAC:* Mammoth, Liebert. *Electrical:* ASCO. *Fire safety:* Preaction System. *Security:* Pasek. *Building controls:* Invensys. *Plumbing fixtures:* Kohler.

where

*Location:* Boston, MA. *Total floor area:* 114,000 sq. ft. *No. of floors:* 4. *Average floor size:* 28,500 sq. ft. *Total staff size:* 530.