

workspace innovation

revolutionizing
the office

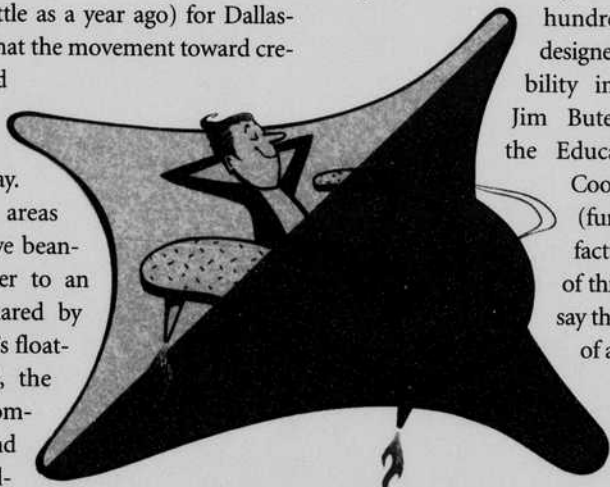
WHEN MANAGEMENT CONSULTANTS AT MCKINSEY & CO. WANTED TO RENOVATE their three-story offices in downtown Toronto, they decided to unify all three floors with a centrally located, free-floating staircase. The result: Ideas now flow up and down the open space, generating more creativity and energy. Sacrificed were multiple private offices from the old model where acquiring personal square footage was more important than fostering creativity.

Kimberly Poole, 24, a workplace strategy consultant (a nonexistent title as little as a year ago) for Dallas-based Aha! Works, says that the movement toward creating teaming areas and public spaces that promote the cross-pollination of ideas is here to stay. These creative project areas range anywhere from five beanbags nestled in a corner to an open-air workbench shared by 15 workers to McKinsey's floating staircase. In effect, the hope is to expand the community that forms around the proverbial water cooler to include the entire office.

When working with a client, Poole's job entails observing behavior patterns and workspace ergonomics, and then finding a solution—thinking outside the boundaries of established architecture when necessary. By helping to design a plan that minimized private space at McKinsey, she was able to maximize the public, inspiration-spawning spaces.

Due to almost constant technological advancement, today's companies change and reinvent themselves so fast that they can't afford the luxury of thinking in

terms of a five-year plan. Instead of focusing on designing landmark buildings that remain unchanged for a hundred years, architects and designers must now integrate flexibility into their structures, says Jim Buter, business director for the Educational and Institutional Cooperative, an office systems (furniture, cubes, etc.) manufacturer and leading proponent of this new approach. "It's safe to say that this will change the shape of architecture forever," he says.



Consultants like Poole and Buter create flexible offices that can change as a company's needs change, allowing businesses to stay fresh and, more importantly, competitive. "We don't concern ourselves with what a client thinks they need, we first figure out how their business works to create a workspace that will grow in ways they have never considered," says Buter.

To take part in the restructuring of the workplace, look for opportunities as an assistant or junior associate at a workspace consulting firm, rather than at an interior design or architecture studio (though experience in these fields is helpful).

new directions

AS NEW FIELDS EMERGE, visionaries are breathing new life into old fields. They're taking on fresh ideas, directions, and approaches—and in the process are creating even more opportunities for adventurous job seekers to shape the future.

interactive web design

THE INFORMATION ARCHITECTS who

built last year's web sites are learning that the term "architecture" no longer applies to information. As the web gets faster and more powerful, static presentation isn't going to cut it. Interactive designers will move beyond navigation bars and boxes to create sites in which information is indexed for each user. The difference? An index presents information based on the way you use it;

architecture forces you to work within an existing framework.

"A site like Amazon is generic [for each user]," says Ted Booth, 31, interaction design director for cutting-edge design firm Method Inc. "It's full of tabs and it doesn't give the user an individualized experience. We'll see sites that will morph over time to fit individuals. If one site has 6 million users, it'll be like