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GIVING VOICE TO THOSE WHO CREATE WORKPLACE DESIGN & FURNISHINGS

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The reception at the new Chicago offices of Corix, a utilities company delivering sustainable water, wastewater and energy utility infrastructure solutions. Designed by NELSON. Photography: Courtesy of NELSON Worldwide

From Farmhouse to City Life / Utility Company Corix, designed by NELSON

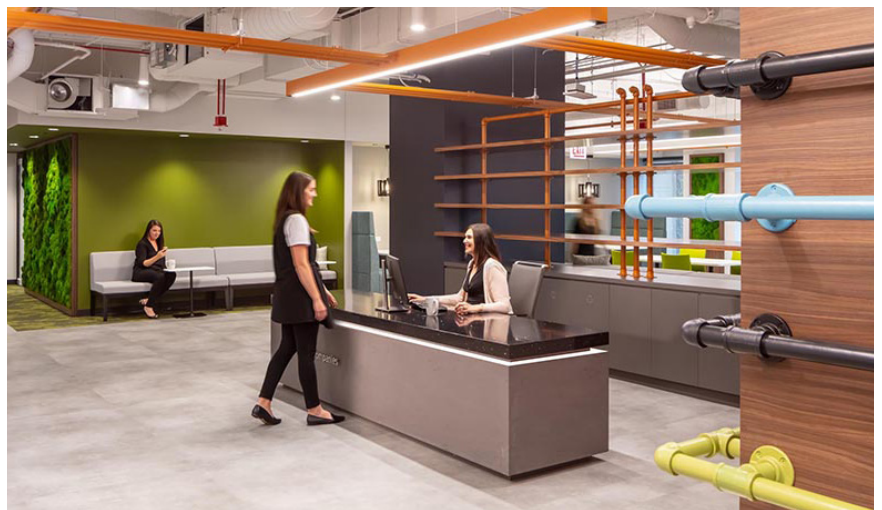
by Mallory Budy

What happens when the country-town kid moves to the big city?

Corix, a utilities company delivering solutions for sustainable water, wastewater and energy infrastructure tapped **NELSON** to create a new home for them, right in the heart of the Windy City.

The new offices are a stark departure from Corix's original home, an old farmhouse in the suburbs of Chicago.

"They had been in this old farmhouse for 50 years, continuing to add on to the house as they expanded," said **Kristin Cerutti**, senior designer at NELSON, in an officeinsight interview. "There were all these little rooms with



At reception, the connecting pipes above reference the deep connection Corix has with the communities it serves.

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a few workstations each, and there was zero opportunity for collaboration – it would take 15 minutes to get to each other, and people just wouldn't make the trip."

"Both aesthetically and in workplace strategy, the two offices feel completely different."

The new 28,000 square foot workspace is organized into 'ecosystems' that "adapt to support their own functions and then circulate out to the environment at large. Each ecosystem contributes to and draws from the same reservoir creating a strong chain of community."

The three sides of the office circulate as their own ecosystems, but then come together into one larger ecosystem. The individual ecosystems represent the three ways they provide utilities to their clients – water, gas, and electricity."

"The ecosystem idea started with what they do as a company," said Ms. Cerutti. "Every person is extremely proud of what they do, they care about the service they're providing, and their connection to the communities they serve. They feel a strong sense of their work contributing to the greater whole. Because of that mentality, they connected with the term 'ecosystem' on a deeper level."

"A sense of community, and their connection to the communities they serve, was the single most important element to them."

The new workspace has very few private offices and exponentially more transparency. And a sprinkle of amenities new to the staff can be found around the new workspace.

Employees have access to café for use during traditional work hours as



"Taking an abstract approach to environmental graphics, NELSON installed pipes throughout the space to serve a dual purpose: vibrant décor and creative wayfinding. Each pipe color represents a core market the company serves and acts as a gentle and organic guide, leading employees and guests in the right direction."



Open meeting spaces and bench-lined window views



A café gathering space is open, modern, and fun.

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Elevator Lobby at Corix's new downtown Chicago offices.



Where Corix's old office presented little opportunity for collaboration, with tiny rooms made up of a few workstations each, the new offices make working together easy.

well as after-hours social events. And as requested by Corix employees, a premade shuffleboard court can be brought in to the café area when they want to play a game of shuffleboard.

Separating the ecosystems are small architectural pods – composed of an open collaborative space, a large meeting room for 6-8 people, meeting rooms for up to four, and focus rooms for 1-2 people.

“It was a huge change for their staff, because the majority lived in the suburbs, so now they would all of a sudden be commuting into the city,” Cerutti said. “The Corix team handled the change management on their own, and they did an excellent job, bringing people into the process at every stage.”

“In their old office, they were very segregated, very siloed. Now, some

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The new workspace has very few private offices and exponentially more transparency.

of the people who requested private offices have even moved into the open office because they like it there more.

“Taking an abstract approach to

environmental graphics, NELSON installed pipes throughout the space to serve a dual purpose: vibrant décor and creative wayfinding,” notes the

project description. “Each pipe color represents a core market the company serves and acts as a gentle and organic guide, leading employees and guests in the right direction.”

Green represents energy, light blue represents gas, and dark blue represents water. A fourth color, orange, represents the greater Corix community, and is featured in all of the office’s community spaces. And with minimal views to the outdoors and the Chicago River, moss walls spread throughout the office help bring the outdoors in. Natural light is maximized by keeping sightlines open from one of the office to the other.

The design team thought creatively about how to give Corix employees a connection back to the farmhouse. This was achieved through the creation of abstract blueprints of the old farmhouse, displayed on the walls of the phone and small meeting rooms.

From farmhouse to the big city – a worthy journey. ■



Moss walls spread throughout the office help bring the outdoors in.