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# BOF

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WORKPLACE DESIGN

## Utility Company Connects its Brand to New HQ Architecture

CORIX CHOSE A 22,000-SQUARE-FOOT SPACE ON THE 36TH FLOOR IN A DOWNTOWN CHICAGO HIGH-RISE AS ITS NEW HEADQUARTERS AND BROUGHT ON NELSON WORLDWIDE TO COMPLETE THE BUILD OUT.

by Emily Clingman

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**It's not every time** that a company's brand translates so literally into the architecture around it. But with Corix Group of Companies, its new headquarters hit the design jackpot.

Corix is a leader in the implementation of sustainable water, wastewater and energy utility infrastructure solutions for small to medium-sized communities across North America. Until recently, it was located in the Chicago suburb of Northbrook, Illinois.

The company started out 50 years ago in a farmhouse, and as it grew over the years, additions were made to the structure, but nothing was cohesive. Employees were working in small groups in actual bedrooms. Other employees were located in additions. The team was extremely segregated. It didn't feel like an office and people just gave up walking the maze of twisted hallways trying to find anyone else. The scenario was affecting the way people worked and obviously, not in a great way.

The other challenge with being located in a random farmhouse off the highway in the suburbs was talent attraction. The remote location and unusual setup lacked a certain draw. Corix decided it was time to move — and a big move it was.

Corix chose a 22,000-square-foot space on the 36th floor in a downtown Chicago high-rise as its new headquarters and brought on Nelson Worldwide to complete the build out. The company wanted the space to be designed for easy engagement and collaboration among its staff. Because of the nature of Corix's services, the company wanted to go industrial in the look and feel.

Nelson transformed Corix's new offices to create an entirely different atmosphere from its previous space. Early on, it was decided to leave the ceilings exposed to enhance the industrial feel.

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“The pipes were an obvious thing,” said Kristin Cerutti, senior designer at Nelson. “At first, we wondered if we could just paint the existing pipes on the ceiling blue, their logo color. Then, it sort of stirred from that. Does it have to be blue? Does it just have to be existing pipes or can we bring in decorative pipes? And why just be decorative? They should have a purpose and a meaning.”

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 — water, gas and electricity — and acts as a gentle and organic guide, leading employees and guests in the right direction.

The office is organized into three neighborhoods, one for each department — ecosystems, as Cerutti explained. Each is designed to support its own function, then circulate out to the environment at large. Using Corix’s three distinct logo colors — two shades of blue and a shade of green, each ecosystem is designated a different color (dark blue for water, light blue for gas and green for energy).

“So, when the pipe colors change, and the furniture colors change slightly, you’ll know which department you’re in,” she said.

The public corridors have orange pipes — a color representative of community and a nod back to pride





