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# CHICAGO LAWYER

## Just right: Levenfeld Pearlstein embraces Swedish design philosophy at new headquarters

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By Melissa Rubalcaba Riske

The perfect amount.

Striking that balance in the legal world is vital, whether it is in settlement discussions or, in Levenfeld Pearlstein's case, the design of its new Chicago headquarters. The firm and NELSON Worldwide's design team were tasked with painting on the blank canvas at 120 S. Riverside Plaza. They looked to the word "lagom" for inspiration, which is Swedish for "not too much, not too little, the right amount."

Kristin Cerutti, a design leader at NELSON, led the project and incorporated "lagom" into the floor plan. Inside the office café, the cabinets are made with light, natural wood. Additionally, the café is peppered with a variety of different size tables and seating options and has ample power outlets to charge electronics. Cerutti added that the café features lots of natural light and a great view of the city.

"(Before the design phases) we conducted interviews of about 40 employees. (The interviews showed) they wanted a space that was impressive, but modest," Cerutti said. "They aren't flashy, but still wanted a sense of presence in their office space. They asked for a light-filled space that was bright and clean and that people were proud of."

Cerutti added: "We felt (lagom) spoke to exactly what Levenfeld Pearlstein was looking for. We incorporated this by making design moves that were strong, but clean, not over the top and that brought light colors that are calming."

### Raw space

When selecting its new location, Levenfeld Pearlstein wanted to be able to mold the space for its unique needs and growing numbers. The firm launched in 1999 with 27 attorneys. Today, it has 110 attorneys and nearly 100 support staff. Since 2003, the firm's Chicago office at 2 N. LaSalle Street occupied two floors and roughly 53,000 square feet. With the move, the firm reduced its overall footprint to 37,500 square feet.

"We wanted raw space to build out and meet not only those needs of today, but for the future," explained Kevin Corrigan, chief operations officer for Levenfeld Pearlstein.

The firm moved into its new headquarters in January. The space, on the 18th floor, gives staff a great view of the city and features lots of natural light. It also has a secure and reliable internet connection and allows for more adaptable workspaces on a single floor.

"We asked, 'What do we need?'" Corrigan said. "What do staff and attorneys need to make it a great place to work?"

Cerutti said this process took about six months to complete. Along with surveys and employee interviews, the team collected information including key card data to understand when and how people used their office spaces. The team reviewed how people were using elements in the office including traffic patterns.

The strategy sessions also provided Levenfeld Pearlstein with trends in its office usage and a better understanding of how much space was needed. Well before the pandemic introduced hybrid work schedules to the masses, the firm allowed its staff to work remotely, whether that meant meeting with clients in New York or spending time at its suburban Northbrook office.

"From the firm's inception, Levenfeld Pearlstein has focused on providing a technology platform that allows the flexibility to work

from anywhere,” Corrigan said. “This enables our attorneys and management to support client and firm needs more efficiently.”

At 120 S. Riverside Plaza, Levenfeld Pearlstein has assigned only about one-third of its offices to attorneys. The remaining offices are unassigned. The firm implemented a reservation system for employees to secure workspace. It allows staff to reserve an office for just a couple of hours or an entire week. If attorneys need to work on a group project, they can reserve an office along with its adjacent space. Each day, a panel outside the office announces who’s using the space.

“We have a very robust reservation system and we’re really enjoying it,” Corrigan said.

## Thinking smaller

To reduce square footage and keep to one floor, Levenfeld Pearlstein elected to reduce each office to roughly 100 square feet. Cerutti, who has 17 years of law firm design experience, said that small offices average between 120 to 130 square feet. But smaller offices don’t necessarily mean less workspace. In the space that would traditionally go to large corner offices, Levenfeld Pearlstein designed open and collaborative spaces with room for small groups and individuals who only need to work from their laptop.

Corrigan said that many attorneys gravitate toward the open spaces, as they enjoy working while being in the company of others.

“Some might prefer to be in their offices, especially if they have a lot of calls, but others enjoy the ability to collaborate and be around others,” Corrigan said.

Large and small conference rooms are available to accommodate meetings of all sizes.

“Huddle rooms,” designed for small groups, are equipped with technology that enables users to make video calls and use projection screens.

“The energy in the new space is really exciting,” Corrigan said.

The firm has been aiming to be 95 percent digital since 2014, Corrigan said. One method to accomplish this goal was to eliminate filing cabinets from offices. That has reduced reliance on paper.

“We want to stay in the forefront rather than play catch up,” Corrigan said, adding that flexibility and digital access to files helps to better serve the firm’s clients.

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