

THE FORUM

By Alan M. Webber

Attention, all you unwilling Dilberts: You have nothing to lose but your cubicles! And all you latter-day Charlie Chaplins, trolling away in factories that look like the last remnants of the Industrial Revolution: Why are you chained to jobs in the workplace of the past?

In fact, take a look around you, wherever you work. Are you stuck in a small, claustrophobic office when your actual work calls out for open spaces and collaboration?

Or are you in an office where somebody got talked into the "open plan" — which is architect's jargon for "no privacy" — but the work requires peace and quiet?

Are you in a factory, where the talk is about "total quality," but the design of the workspace says "totally cheap"?

More than ever, design matters. (If you don't believe me, just ask the folks at Apple about the impact of the Mac on their earnings or the execs at Volkswagen about the new Beetle.)

And the first place where design shows up, interestingly, isn't in a company's products, services, or even its ads. It's in its workspace.

Fast companies have figured out that the way in which they design their offices, factories, warehouses, stores, and shops makes a big difference. Design contributes in a multitude of ways: Good design either helps — or hurts — productivity by creating a workspace that con-

tributes to efficiency and boosts morale. Good design promotes — or frustrates — creativity, by offering workers

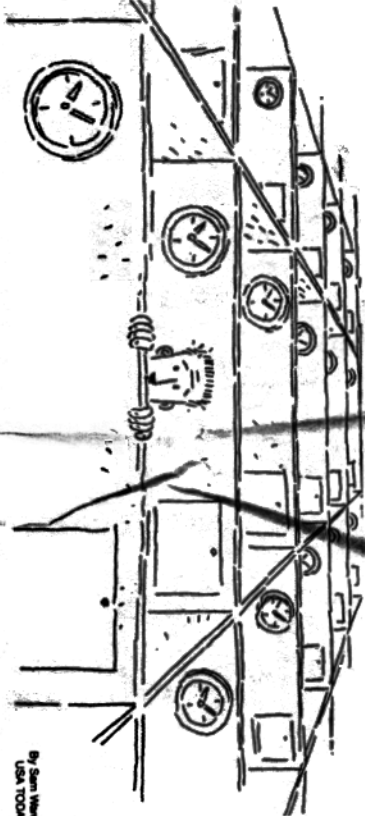
informal places they can gather to swap ideas and share insights. And perhaps most important, good design expresses — or suppresses — the company's own character, which is of critical importance in the wide-open talent market, where smart, ambitious workers scope out the way a workplace looks and feels before they decide whether they want to join the company.

How does design make a difference? Consider three examples of real-life, fast companies that are putting the design of their space to work for them.

If you go to the top floor of the third-tallest building in Dallas, Texas, you'll find yourself in an office that looks like a video game. Demons and monsters lurk atop walks slanted ceilings and multilevel floors all suggest a challenging, slightly gory game come to life. Why an office that looks like a video game? To reflect what actually goes on there! You're in the offices of Ion Storm, one of the country's hottest computer-gaming companies.

Or if you travel north, to Brampton, a suburb of Toronto, you can stroll through a massive factory-of-a-building that resembles a city laid on its side. There are two main arteries — Main Street and the Colonnade — seven indoor parks, a Zen garden, a dry-cleaner and a bank, basketball and volleyball

# When it comes to creative companies, design matters



By Sam Wask USA TODAY

courts, and a wide array of cafes and restaurants. Where are you now? The headquarters of Nortel, a \$15.5 billion global telecommunications giant, which transformed a 600,000-square-foot factory into a city-like environment.

Why a city? To win over its headquarters employees who were reluctant to move from Toronto to the suburbs. And if you go to Freeport, Maine, you could practically

get lost in a 650,000-square-foot warehouse, equipped with 3.5 miles of conveyor belts, storage for four million items, 25 shipping docks, and its own built-in FedEx package-handling center. But it's not just a warehouse — it's the new L.L. Bean order fulfillment center, a facility that sits at the heart of the catalog giant's quality and service operation, handling 12 million packages a year.

What's so special about a warehouse? The employees of L.L. Bean helped design it.

First, companies need to get the big idea: Design is how people really work. There's a reason why the best offices today look like coffee shops — that's a design for a workspace in which people can talk, compare notes, share ideas, and cook up innovations. It's the same reason why factories today look more like, well, offices

and its way of working. According to David Dunn, Nortel's director of global workplace planning, who oversaw the company's city-like space design, "This project was about more than consolidating bricks and mortar. We understood that we could align the factory's reinvention with the company's reinvention — and with our core values."

One reason Ion Storm has gone to such great lengths in the design of its video-game office space is to send a message to the people who work there — and those the company hopes to attract as employees in the future. The design is a way of saying that you won't find a cooler, more cutting-edge game company — and that counts in the competition to attract and keep talent.

There's also a big lesson for employees — and would-be employees: Don't go to work in an office or factory that looks like it's out of the past. In fact, before you sit down for an interview, ask to take a tour of the place. If it looks like a daily dose of Dilbert or an assembly line that only Charlie Chaplin could love, you already know enough about that company: They may not be losers on purpose — but they are clearly losers by design.

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# Drunken behavior accepted in Japan

■ Drinking with boss, year-end parties make inebriation a common sight during this season.

By Michael Zielenziger  
KNIGHT RIDDER NEWSPAPERS

TOKYO — It is 12:25 a.m., and as they stagger through Shinjuku station goggle-eyed and plastered, the people who seemed so genteel and well-mannered by day have become a drunken, boisterous mob.

Near one stairwell, a well-dressed woman vomits in front of a vending machine. At another entrance, a 50ish salaryman in a trench coat falls on the steps leading up to the railway platform. A drunken colleague flails wildly, trying to help him.

Welcome to the end-of-the-year *bonenkai* season in Japan, where getting desperately drunk is part of the festivities. Booze remains a key social lubricant in this commerce-focused, group-oriented society, where whom you know in business and government counts far more than how well you perform.

Cementing relations over a bottle of sake is always considered appropriate. Red-faced drunks careening down the street late at night swinging their briefcases, or swaying uncontrollably in the train, are a fairly common site year-round in Japanese cities. Wining and dining are an important part of the job.

But in December, when employees get their bonus checks and company *bonenkai* — “forget the year” — parties are in full swing, hundreds of thousands of exuberant drunks crowd city watering holes. Then these roaring, lubricated masses pour into giant stations like Shinjuku just before 1 a.m. to cram and push their way into the last train home to their distant suburbs.

“Every night I work here I’m scared,” said a policeman posted inside Shinjuku station as the raucous mob of about 75,000 passengers poured through the turnstiles, the din reverberating along distant concourses.

## Pressure-relief valve

In one of the most rigid and pressure-filled societies in the world, drunkenness and dependence on alcohol are considered an acceptable release valve, experts say.

“Unlike Americans, Japanese people don’t regard alcohol as a drug,” said Tsukasa Mizusawa, an alcohol counselor who treats the families of Japanese alcoholics. “Among doctors and social workers, we really think this alcoholism is a big problem, but I think most people don’t care. Society isn’t interested. Denial is very strong.”

Alcohol consumption is decreasing in most of the industrialized world but still rising in Japan. Over the past four decades, per-capita alcohol consumption has risen fourfold in Japan, according to the National Institute of Alcoholism.

Official data suggest Japanese drink about as much alcohol per person as Americans do, about 1.74 gallons a year per person. Since many Japanese women are teetotalers, however, recent studies estimate that Japanese men in their 50s drink more than twice as much as Caucasian American contemporaries.

While many American corporations are aggressively battling alcohol abuse among their employees, in Japan, the bosses are often the ones forcing their subordinates to drink.

“In feudal times, only the super-rich could make and drink sake, so to drink sake was a rare honor,” Mizusawa explained. In contemporary society, “to refuse to accept sake from someone, especially from your boss, is a terrible insult. So if you don’t accept a drink from your boss, it can really damage your career chances. And often he keeps on pouring.”

In response, the Japanese have coined a new term — *alru-hara*, or alcohol harassment — for times when a company worker is forced to get drunk against his will.