Vancouver Studio

Project Summary

A reimagined Vancouver studio

After 20+ years at our previous Vancouver location, we sought a new space that would allow us to embrace evolving workplace trends, and create an environment that fosters collaboration, flexibility, and employee wellness. The solution was found in the iconic Arthur Erickson Place tower, where bold design strategies honour the building's architectural legacy, promote sustainability, and showcase adaptability.

The challenge was downsizing from our previous multi-level home to a single floor—nearly 40% smaller than our previous space—while maximizing functionality and promoting social interaction and creativity.

When considering embodied carbon emissions, a key driver for the project, our challenge was, "How low can we go?". We therefore endeavored to maximize use of existing materials. Using a circular design approach, the team selected material components and parts from the previous studio that were reused, reassembled, or reimagined for a wide variety of uses.

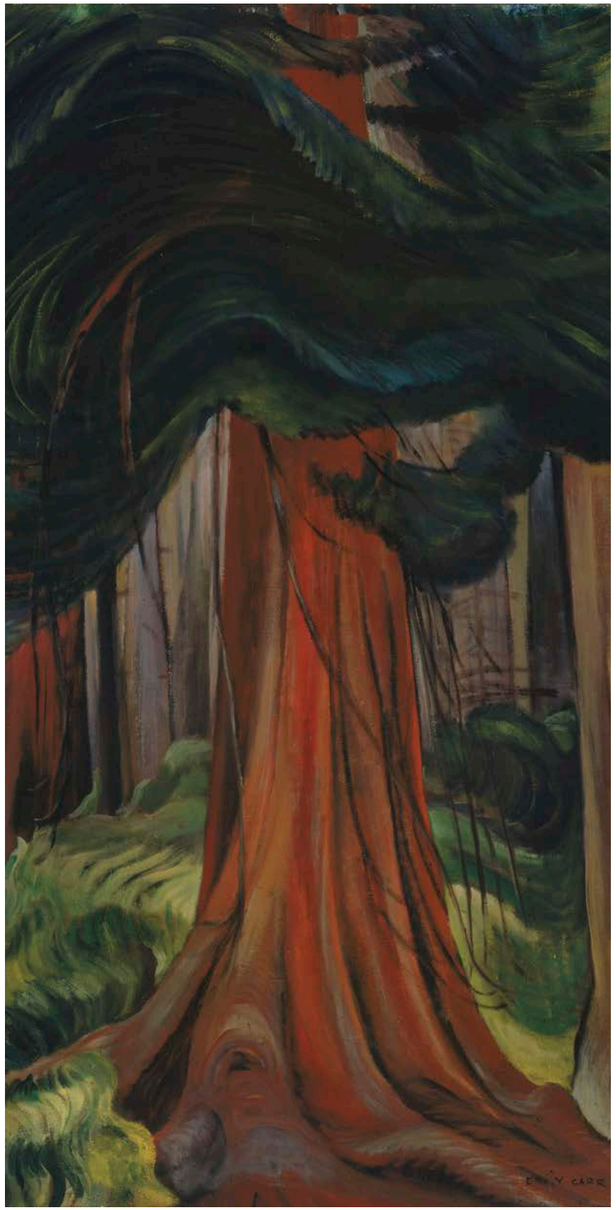
The result is a space that reduced embodied carbon emissions by more than half—a flexible, wellness-orientated workspace that serves as a living example of innovation, efficiency, and sustainability in modern office design.

The project is RESET® Accredited and is on track to certify WELL v2 Gold, while the base building is LEED O+M Platinum and ZCB-Performance certified.

RESET® Accredited

On track to certify
WELL v2 Gold

Exterior View by Michael Elkan.

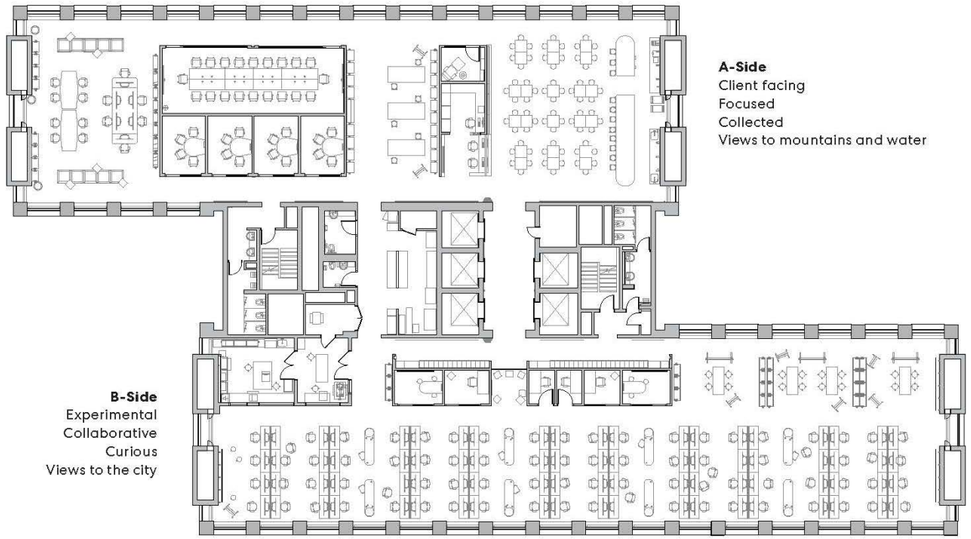


Emily Carr, *Red Cedar*, 1931

Honouring legacy and the land

In the concept design phase, we compared a few different options for our next home: a) move into a newly constructed building; b) build additional floors above our existing space; or c) relocate to an existing building within Vancouver's downtown core. Based on core values of the studio, the team chose to relocate to the Arthur Erickson Place heritage tower and rehabilitate the 22nd floor, in order to reduce embodied and operational carbon. We found strong values alignment with the property owners who committed to a net-zero future for the building while creating a safe and healthy work environment for tenants: the 26-storey building had recently been retrofitted and has since achieved CaGBC Zero Carbon Building Performance Standard™ and LEED Platinum certifications - aligning with our firm's Green Operations Plan. The brutalist building's ample daylight and views, amenities, and proximity to multiple modes of transit made it an ideal choice for our design practice, and proves that through adaptive reuse, well designed architecture can be enduring and high performing.

Erickson described the original design as two towers joined by a core. Our interior concept reinforces this architectural concept by organizing the studio into two zones: A-Side and B-Side. The floor plan respects the 10-foot structural rhythm, giving the space an organizational rigour while allowing for areas of expression. The building was inspired by the work of Canadian artist Emily Carr, and so too are the warm earth tones of the studio's interior experience. The palette of Carr's 1931 painting *Red Cedar* contrasts the solemn grey exterior and connects us to nature.



Floor Plan

In the heart of the city

The studio is located at the heart of the Central Business District of Downtown Vancouver and is accessible by all modes of transit, with connections across the city and metropolitan area. A short 110 meter walk to Burrard Skytrain Station, the building then connects to all major bus routes, the Expo, Millennium and Canada SkyTrain lines, as well as the West Coast Express and SeaBus, allowing for swift journeys to and from the North Shore and beyond.

The studio location has a Walk Score of 99 (walkers paradise), Transit Score of 100 (riders paradise), and Bike Score of 88 (very bikable). The building also provides 102 long-term bike spaces for occupants.

A space for community

The social heart of the studio is the “living room”, a large open vibrant space that acts as our café and kitchen. Whether connecting over food, a quick meeting, a lunch-and-learn, or our weekly all-staff seminar, this space wears many hats and flexes to accommodate a myriad of uses.

The living room was also designed as an open and welcoming space for the broader community. Beyond serving as our day-to-day gathering spot, the space functions as a dynamic venue for events, gatherings, and meetings where we regularly host community groups, industry organizations, and other creatives. By fostering these connections, we aim to contribute to a collaborative design culture while strengthening ties within the local community.

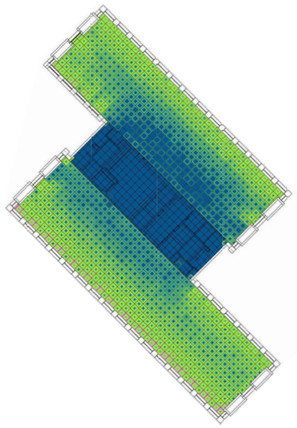
We purposely designed a flexible studio space that welcomes not just our own team, but our clients and the broader community.

Light considerations

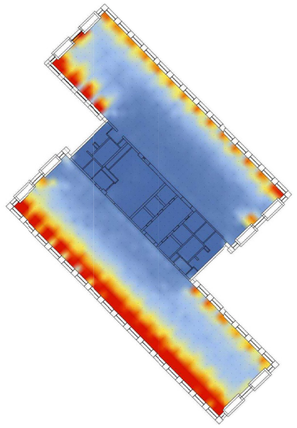
Maintaining the building's original design intent, the deeply recessed windows and indirectly lit coffered ceilings allow for abundant natural light and views to enter.

Daylight and glare analysis was conducted early in design. Additionally, the project pursued several strategies under the WELL Light category. 74% of the regularly occupied floor area of the studio is within 6m of the windows to provide daylighting and views.

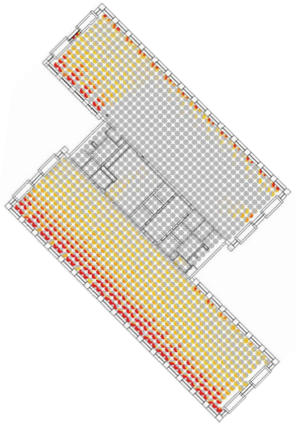
Workstations are placed perpendicular to windows to limit glare. In areas where there is less daylight, such as meeting rooms, the model shop, and the wellness room, glazing is maximized and glazing film is applied where privacy is needed. Light sensors are implemented to balance out daylight and artificial light throughout the day.



Daylight Analysis—UDI



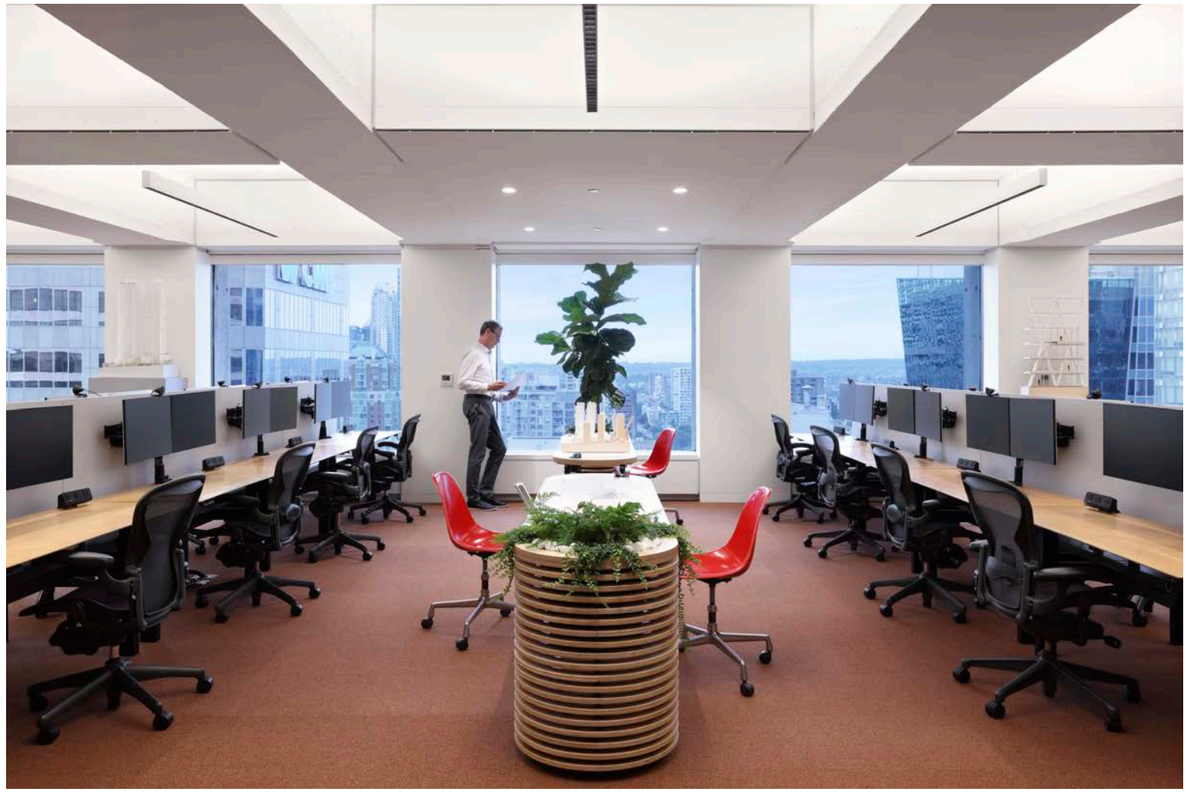
Solar Radiation



Glare Analysis

Air quality

Five display sensors monitor CO, CO2, humidity, PM, VOCs, and temperature across the studio. The project has achieved RESET Air Accreditation and is on track to certify WELL v2 Gold (we are currently awaiting performance testing to determine the final result). Ventilation systems meet the supply and exhaust rates set in the WELL ventilation guidelines.



Design for health and well being

Health and well being was front of mind for the design team, and the studio is the result of extensive collaboration and engagement with our staff. We worked closely with a Human Experience specialist, held weekly group design discussions, as well as various workshops and events to further engage with everyone along the entire design and construction process, including:

- Concept Charrette
- Biophilic Design Workshop
- Social Equity Workshop
- Propagation Workshop
- Regular Construction Site Tours

Biophilic design

Biophilic design principles are thoughtfully woven throughout the space, with repurposed wood surfaces and natural materials featuring prominently. A living wall, carefully propagated from the previous studio by our staff and then transplanted in the cafe, stands as a testament to this connection, and reinforces a sense of continuity and renewal. Additional greenery, thoughtfully placed to suit varying light conditions, brings vitality to the design.

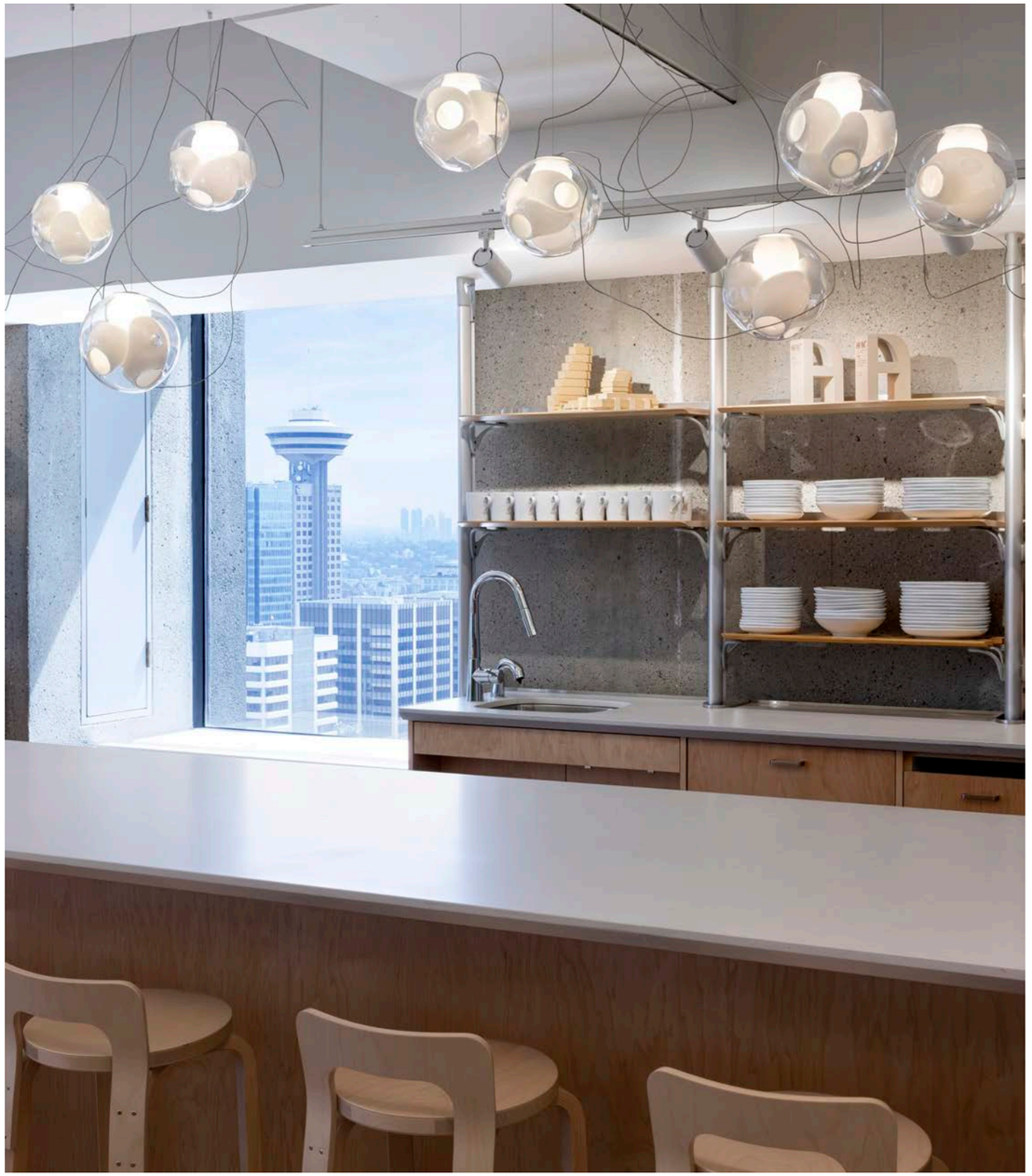
Movement

Movement is encouraged throughout the space in various ways, and the studio is designed for socializing and collaboration. Desks are equipped with electric height-adjustable work surfaces to accommodate both seated and standing positions, and various working areas are provided around the studio. Physical activity is supported with an onsite gym, complete with locker rooms and showers, as well as with the nearby bike network and onsite bike storage.

Efficient water use

The studio design incorporates low flow water fixtures as much as possible, and some existing building fixtures were also reused. In washrooms, touchless sensor faucets reduce overconsumption. Through the selection of low flow/flush fixtures the project was able to reduce its potable water consumption by 39%.

Filtered drinking water is provided in the kitchen via water dispenser for cold, hot, ambient and sparkling water, reducing bottled water use and keeping staff hydrated. Drinking water meets quality thresholds for chemicals, organics and pesticides in order to satisfy WELL prerequisites for water quality. Water quality is regularly tested and results are submitted annually through the WELL digital platform.



Low carbon future

Our firm as a whole has the following ESG goals:

Decarbonization: Eliminate direct fossil fuel use in all our studios' operations by 2025.

Energy Conservation: Improve our studios' energy efficiency, using less than 35kbtu/sf annually starting in 2025.

Green Power: Help decarbonize our utility grid by integrating on-site renewable energy sources that generate 50% of office energy annually, starting in 2025.

Carbon Offset: Address any remaining carbon emissions through the purchase of responsible carbon offsets.

Our new studio meets these goals by being located in an extremely energy efficient, low-carbon building - Arthur Erickson Place stands out for its industry-leading environmental initiatives. The tower's 26 storeys were recently upgraded to achieve Canada Green Building Council's (CGBC) Zero Carbon Building Performance Standard™ certification.

Commitment to circularity

The design of the studio prioritizes sustainability, achieving a reduction in embodied carbon emissions by more than half. This was accomplished through the extensive reuse of materials from our previous studio. Existing desks, casework, shelving, and tabletops were repurposed. These had been fastened mechanically, making it easy to separate each component, and were made from plywood, a material easy to cut and re-shape to suit new functions. The team created a 3D model of each element to design refabricated items for the new space. The furniture fabricator then ensured that these pieces would be compatible with standard parts and reshaped the material into desks, tabletops, shelving, and planters.

Seating throughout the space was largely reused, with selective additions of new pieces only where necessary. Even functional elements like marker boards and library tables were reused, ensuring that every design decision contributed to a significantly reduced carbon footprint.

Any new products are free of substances listed on the Precautionary List and meet WELL requirements.

The project tracked and quantified carbon using TallyCAT. A whole building life cycle assessment (LCA) was completed in the Schematic Design phase which acted as the baseline. A proposed whole building life cycle assessment (LCA) was built in the Construction Phase, representative of the final built project.

The LCA results indicated embodied carbon to be 54 kgCO2e/m2 for modules A-C and 114 kgCO2e/m2 for the baseline model, resulting in a 52% reduction in embodied carbon.

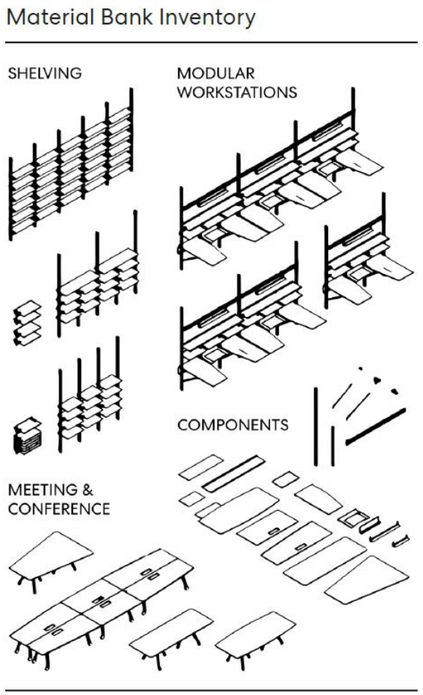
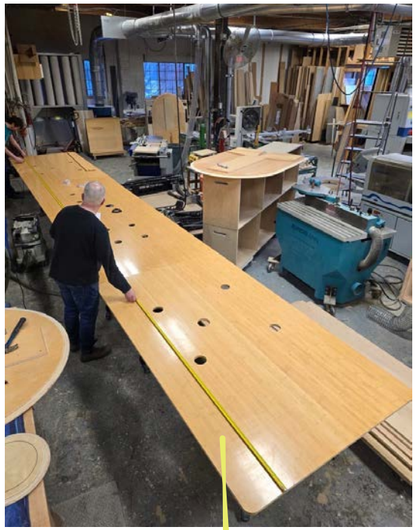
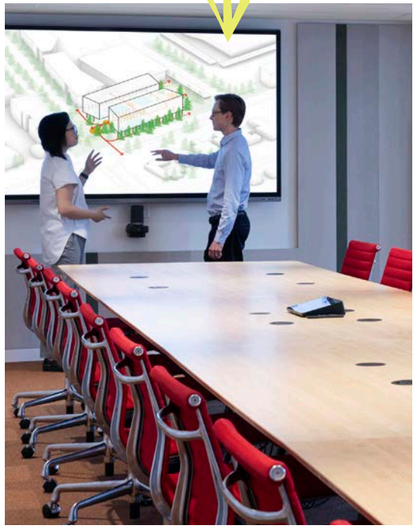


Image: Inventory of existing elements to adapt into new furnishings

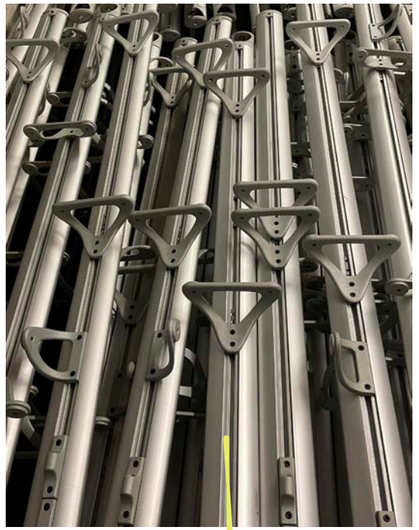
52%
reduction in embodied carbon

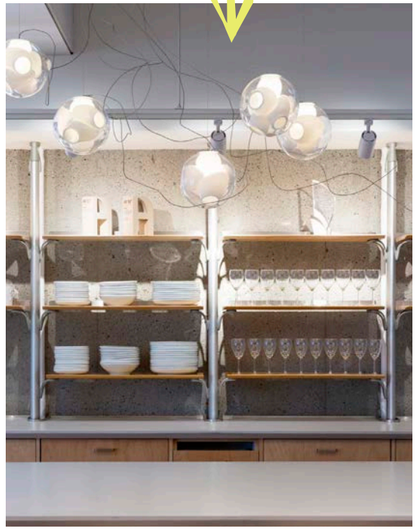
Old table tops became new planters.



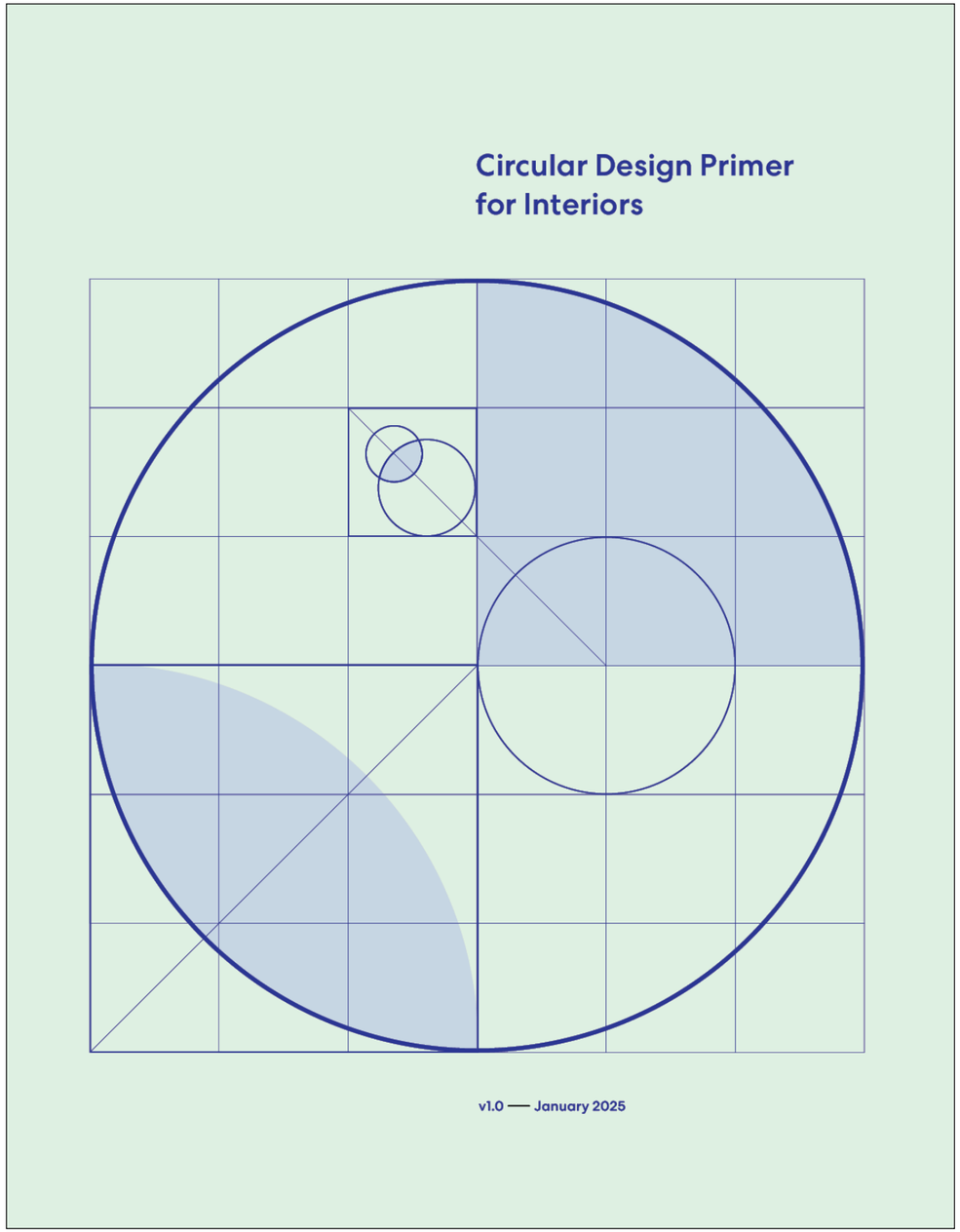


Our up-cycled boardroom table.





Workstation components are re-used.

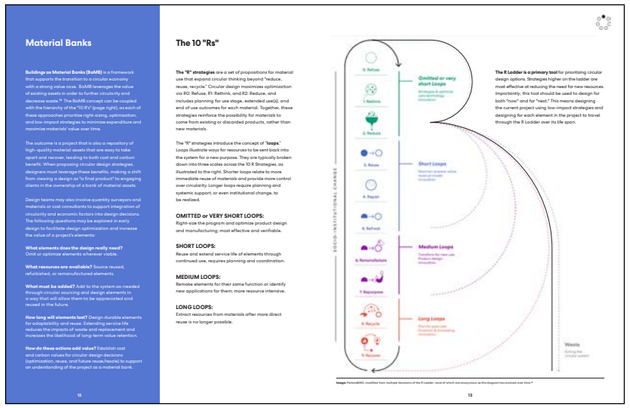


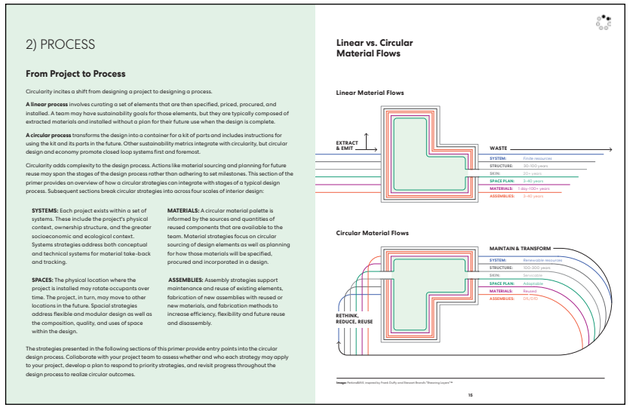
Educating and engaging

We have sought to raise expectations among our peers, our collaborators, and our clients by practicing within a policy of total environmental, economic and social responsibility. We implement a green philosophy in all that we do, working exclusively with consultants who share our commitment and approach. This is not a separate or additional service: it is an integral part of our practice.

The project is included as one of five feature case studies in our firm's newly-released *Circular Design Primer for Interiors*, which distills the best practices of circular design from projects across our global practice. Through a comprehensive set of strategies, the primer showcases how teams have met ambitious sustainability goals, and set new precedents for broader adoption of circular outcomes.

← ***See brochure link by clicking on image (*this will open a branded website with our firm name)***






DETAIL
DETAIL
DETAIL