

Workplace Insights

A Law Firm Re-Invented: Two Years Later

Law firms traditionally evoke a very specific set of visual imagery in our collective consciousness: spacious partner suites filled with rich wood tones and sumptuous finishes...stately portraits lining the walls...sprawling private conference rooms cloistered from view...and a decided hierarchy of space that often deprives clients and visitors of the best experiences.



Graydon is one of Cincinnati's oldest, largest, and most prestigious law firms. Founded in 1871, the firm spent most of the last 50 years located in just such a space, in the heart of the Queen City at Fountain Square. The twin inertias of time and comfort had long precluded any radical change in the company's surroundings. However, in recent years the firm's leadership began to perceive a need to address the changing dynamics of work, talent acquisition, and service to their clients in a way that would be both forward-looking and lasting.

Graydon consulted with Kolar Design to dramatically redevelop the firm's forward-facing brand, created internal initiatives to transition to the next phase of the company's growth, and retained Hixson to design a new working environment: their law firm of the future. This new 35,000 square foot office concept was designed to revolutionize the way the firm engages with its clients, its changing workforce demographics, and the community at-large. Breaking with many of the historic paradigms of legacy law firms, this new space establishes a dynamic contemporary standard to reflect Graydon's own evolution, while respectfully remembering its long history.

Managing this significant change and at the same time enriching Graydon's future was a critical challenge for the entire design team, presented across a variety of factors, including:

- **Location.** Graydon elected to move from the building they had occupied for nearly the last half century to a location offering a connection to a vibrant, growing riverfront culture.
- **Design.** The traditional hierarchy of sprawling, cloistered private offices was left behind in favor of a standardized office size for everyone, while enabling the premium views of the river to be shared by all in common community spaces, forward-facing conference rooms, and an informal café area.
- **Reduce/Reuse.** Part of Graydon's re-visioning was a move toward a less-consumptive office by drastically reducing paper filing and library space.
- **New Approaches.** New artwork, provided by Cincinnati's Art Design Consultants, enlivens the space and celebrates work from local artists, including one of Graydon's own attorneys.

The Journey to "WOW"

First-time visitors can often be heard saying, "WOW!" when stepping off the elevator into Graydon's new home, two floors in the Scripps Center which offer dramatic sweeping views of the Ohio River and surrounding areas. These views, particularly the signature view of the historic Roebling Bridge, became a direct metaphoric link to Graydon's aspirations: building bridges within the firm, to its clients, and in its enhanced connection to the community.

The views, and the ideas of bridges and connectivity, were critical to the reconsideration of how space should be allocated in Graydon's new environment. The new design is pivotal in enhancing the sense of community within the firm's walls. The firm committed 3,000 square feet of prime space to their clients and the public to be used to continuously bridge the gap between the law firm and the community.

Clients and guests are made to feel welcome, and encouraged to return. Graydon's unique "concierge" approach to client service greets visitors at a custom-fabricated desk made from reclaimed railroad ties and a live-edge wood top with glass inset to represent the nearby Ohio River. Marmorino Veneziano plaster sculpts the wall beyond to foster immediate engagement with the space.



Collaboration was identified as a key factor in the firm's philosophy, and a marker of true connectivity with clients and community. Collaborative opportunities abound, whether in informal conversations around the communicating stair, enjoying a cup of coffee (or a beer) and a view in the café, or more formally in conference and huddle environments throughout.

[After the Honeymoon - Still a Love Story](#)

Two years after moving into the space, Hixson and Graydon convened to evaluate the ongoing success of the project. The team found that the space continues to meet and, in many cases, exceed Graydon's initial goals, and supports their continuing journey and transformation of the firm.

Full of light, layered with color and transparency, surrounded by vibrant artwork, and buzzing with energy, Graydon's dream of being a Law Firm of the Future has been realized. The design embodies both the Graydon brand and vision, which has allowed them to grow into who they wanted to be as a firm. "We are living the things we talked about being," said one Graydon partner. "The longer we have been in this space, the more positive the outcome."

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