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Offices that inspire

There's nothing generic about these workspaces

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The law office of Joseph M. Madden & Architecture [Joyce Owens](#) in the [River District](#). COURTESY PHOTO

The setting for the paper company in the popular sit-com "The Office" is a ubiquitous one with lots of fluorescent lighting and generic interior design. There is a world of office space outside the standard fare, however, that provides distinct, elegant and sophisticated settings in which to do business.

Here are four [Southwest Florida](#) offices that hum with productivity — whether the people in them are managing wealth, practicing law or architecture, selling art or offering interior design services — and do so with a sense of style that would make [Michael Scott](#)'s knees weak with envy.

The Sanibel-Captiva [Trust Company](#) headquarters, Sanibel

Driving across the [Sanibel Causeway](#), architect Joyce Owens was inspired by a green color in the water. Later, she matched it up with paint for The [Sanibel Captiva Trust Company](#)'s headquarters.

"I literally chose that color based on what the water will look like on a good day when the river isn't dumping into it," she says. "I want my spaces to be a part of where they are."

It's one of the ways Ms. Owens redesigned the office of the private wealth and asset management company last year to reflect its natural surroundings and the environmental awareness of the people there. She calls the style Tropical Modern.

"We really designed the office to reflect how our clients might be comfortable when they come to visit us," Terry Igo, president of the trust company, says. "On Sanibel that means something different than in [Naples](#) or [New York City](#)... It's elegant, but it's not over the top."



Top and right: The reception area at The Sanibel-Captiva Trust Company is meant to reflect the natural environment of the islands. BRIAN JOHNSON / [COURTESY PHOTOS](#)



The 4,000-square-foot headquarters has three conference rooms, including a boardroom wired for long-distance meetings. Called Polycom, the system is "the business version of Skype," Mr. Igo says. The space also features bamboo floors; wide panes of glass that let in natural light; and dark wood furnishings. The modern looks and technology are juxtaposed with old pictures. A black-and-white photo behind the reception area is a map of [Sanibel Island](#) circa 1833.

But all that style doesn't necessarily mean extravagant expense.

"You want to spend your money on key things that make a really big impact," Ms. Owens says. "And you keep everything very simple."

[Law Office](#) of Joseph M. Madden Jr., [Fort Myers](#)

In the evenings and all night, a [George Nelson](#) "Cigar Lamp" glows invitingly in the big front windows of attorney Joseph M. Madden Jr.'s office on [Main Street](#) in downtown Fort Myers.

The office is actually made up of two tenant spots in the building, which were combined. Mr. Madden shares the space there with architect Ms. Owens, who redesigned the interior in 2008.

"One of the big components here is Joyce's lighting design that I think makes it pop," Mr. Madden says. "It's a place you come and feel completely comfortable doing 10 hours a day."

The raw space for the law office included a conference room, an enclosed office for Mr. Madden, a "very cool file room," he says, a room to deal with real estate documents, and workspace for five assistants.

After stripping the space clean, Ms. Owens polished the old terrazzo floor to its original glory and left the brick walls exposed.

"We chose not to cover that up," she says. "I like to use what is there and available. It all adds to the character of the space."

She also raised the ceiling as Mr. Madden requested, so that he and staff could play a beanbag game called cornhole, for those times when practicing real estate and land development law wears thin.

"Joyce moved the ceiling up about a foot and a half to accommodate it," Mr. Madden says. "It just kind of goes with our theme of being very relaxed. We try to practice happy law."

UP Art & Design Gallery and Andrea Clark Brown Architects, Naples

A few years ago, after architect Andrea Clark Brown married the artist John Carroll Long, the couple decided to create a combined studio/office for their businesses.

Ms. Brown had already purchased the space near downtown Naples for her architectural practice. Now more than half the 2,800 square feet is open to the public as Mr. Long's art gallery. It's called UP Art & Design Gallery, but the luminous front windows — "a beacon for the art inside" — also bear the name of Ms. Brown's firm, though less prominently.

She sees the space less as two separate entities and more a reflection of shared intellectual pursuits.

Ms. Brown's clients make their way by her husband's sometimes-humorous sculptures — years ago he was a syndicated newspaper cartoonist — and back toward her architectural studio. Her personal office near the back opens into a garden. "Clients love coming through the gallery to me," she says.

When she bought the building it was outdated, divided down the middle like a duplex, with wood paneling. The back portion had been made into a residential apartment. She immediately re-envisioned it as a contemporary space for her architectural firm.

"In my mind, always in an architect's mind, it had the potential for reorganization," she says.

She took out the dividing wall and she added a cupola in the center room, a kind of skylight that sticks up above the roof and brings in light from all four sides.

Now one of her husband's sculptures, a commentary on over population called "Bumper to Bumper," extends up into the cupola. The piece features about 500 micro cars Mr. Long bonded together. They descend from a green, grassy ball near the top of the cupola down to the floor in a spiral.

Ms. Brown also hangs her detailed, wooden architectural models for viewers to enjoy.

UP Gallery is open from 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. weekdays and from afternoon to early evening most weekends. But often, Ms. Brown says, she and her husband work late, and if the lights are on, the gallery is open.

Decorating Den Interiors, [Punta Gorda](#)

In an inspired touch, interior designer Marilyn Brazill salvaged an old arched window frame from Habitat for Humanity. She filled it with a mirror and hung it in her new interior design showroom and office in Punta Gorda.

"I really wanted something unique," she says.

The rest of Decorating Den, once a yacht sales office with nearly two-decade old furniture and carpet, was also redone in Ms. Brazill's inimitable style.

"This was a vision and it actually came out the way I wanted it to," she says. "I stuck to my guns."

The products she sells, such as environmentally friendly fabrics and indoor/outdoor rugs, pop out against the office's white walls and black countertops. Customers enter into an open and airy space. The back of the office, near the refrigerator, features a countertop of miniature tiles made from recycled black glass.

"The first impression when you walk into the front door is so important," Ms. Brazill says. "If you've got a big desk blocking the entry way, it's not a good feeling. You want to be able to look around for a second and just get your bearings."

A room off the hallway leading to the back of the office has three styles of paintings in it. One is "modern," a fuzzy abstraction of colors; another is "transitional," between modern and classic, with sailboats in an impressionist sea; and the third is "classic," a still life rendered in gold on a black background. To get an idea of how to approach her clients' design, Ms. Brazill asks them which of the three they prefer. Their answers can serve as a start to a workplace that fits their personality, something she strived for in her own office space.

"I think when you walk in here, you get a good feeling," she says.

And that's probably good for business.

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