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View with a room



The view from the 39th floor of Clark Hill's new Chicago office offers a front-row seat to one of the city's biggest tourist attractions.

Near the top of One Prudential Plaza, the main conference room and reception area looks out on the northern edge of Millennium Park. On an afternoon the week of Thanksgiving, people looked like ants as they gathered around the bean-shaped sculpture "Cloud Gate" and waited for a Zamboni to smooth the ice at the McCormick Tribune Ice Rink.

To the far left is an unobstructed view of Lake Shore Drive and Lake Michigan along with the South Loop and South Shore neighborhoods.

Though he is now happy and appreciates what the office has become, managing member Ray Koenig was not initially interested in the building as an option for Clark Hill's relocation. When the 130 E. Randolph St. office was considered in a list of 80 possible new locations, he initially voted it down.

"I viewed [the Prudential Building] like your grandpa's Oldsmobile," Koenig said. "My stepdad would talk about how it was once the largest building in Chicago; the last time I was in the lobby, it needed work, but I was convinced to give it a second look."

Clark Hill moved into One Prudential Plaza in September following a three-wave process that lasted three weeks; staff, furniture and equipment was moved from its previous two offices on 150 N. Michigan Ave. and 135 S. LaSalle St.; the latter is completely vacant now while the former was expected to be empty in December.

The Chicago office is the third largest of the 12 Clark Hill offices nationwide, behind Detroit and Pittsburgh. But the new 71,813-square-foot space is designed to support more attorneys than any other office, given that it's located in the firm's biggest service area.

Though it has room for 120 lawyer offices across its three floors, it houses 61 attorneys and 95 total staff as of the end of October.

"If we grow at the same rate we've grown in the last 10 years, we'll be full in three years," Koenig said. "But we don't intend to grow that fast. I suspect we'll be full in five to six years."



Expanding into modernity

The new office space, built into the rectangular floor plan on the 37th, 38th and 39th floors, has a clean appearance that looks minimalist but hides a few secrets behind its walls, including meeting spaces whose walls move to create larger rooms and a clients-only coffee station that sits behind an unassuming door with no handle in the reception area.

Koenig wanted to distinguish Clark Hill from a traditional firm look with a “finish that looks more modern, progressive and European,” he said.

Smaller design aspects of the space serve purposes cosmetic and practical: Exposed brick offers a hip, contemporary look to certain attorney offices, while, at the same time, conventional drop tiles hang over most of the work spaces. Meanwhile, open ceiling in common areas serves a utilitarian purpose.

“It eats the sound,” Koenig said. “It’s multipurpose for us; if it was all drop ceiling, it wouldn’t be as fun or look as interesting and unwanted sound would travel farther.”

The firm took the relocation opportunity to replace traditional larger partner offices with uniform offices for all attorneys.

“It allowed us to do away with a lot of the things that come along with [the question of] who gets a bigger office,” Koenig said. “In the old days, other than ego, partners would have 500 files compared to an associate’s 10, so they needed the extra space. But now we’re in the digital age.”

The space was also created with flourishes — and improvements — that benefit the employees as well as clients and other visitors. Firm leadership established focus committees that allowed everyone from support staff to leadership to speak freely about what additions they desired for the new space.

One request included small, private phone rooms for the support staff. They built one on every floor of the office.

“I can close my office door, but they can’t,” Koenig said. “It was something that was easy for us to do and they asked for it, so why not?”

Ample breakout space on every floor attracts younger attorneys to collaborate with, or next to, each other outside of their offices, Koenig said. Both the lunchroom and the copy/IT room have windows with pleasant views of downtown Chicago that the Michigan Avenue office lacked; Koenig said the change has resulted in more staff eating their lunches in the new space.

Natural light floods Clark Hill’s new office. The light, along with the views of the city, is why there’s not much need for art on the walls, Koenig said. The frosted glass walls between each office and the hallway allow light to pour through the floors, even on overcast days.

Also, making up for the lack of art in the hallways are the support staff interior offices’ walls, which are painted in colors that play off of the colors in Millennium Park and the lake.

Even though the frosted glass allows a passerby to see who is in an office, the open-door policy — long a Clark Hill cultural staple — often removes the need to guess.

“Our open-door policy is just an example of how transparent and progressive we are in everything we do, from how we deal with clients to how we manage them,” Koenig said. “How our office is laid out visually is just an extension of that.”

— *Dustin J. Seibert*

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