



## Designing Offices to Place People First

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The emergence of Covid, followed by the Delta variant, has raised numerous questions, including how to provide employees with a safe workplace that allows for productivity, efficiency and boosts employee morale. Across the board, we see this cohort in many industries. Ball Janik, LLP, a law firm headquartered in downtown Portland, Oregon, sets itself apart as a progressive and inclusive law firm and these people-centric values shined bright while designing their new office space. The main goal was to place the people first.

Armed with the knowledge that the best employee-employer relationship is a two-way street, the Ball Janik team set out to create a space that welcomes all and provides the foundation for fruitful working relationships. The emphasis on the individual experience strengthens the design and company. This driving principle gave way to other key tenets of the design: equitable access to daylight, inclusive spaces that foster connection and creative thought exchange, and a welcoming and supportive environment.

Ball Janik enlisted the team of LRS Architects, Inc. to ensure their vision was designed thoughtfully. LRS drew inspiration from Ball Janik's powerful branding and bold tagline, "Boutique Service | Towering Capabilities," by creating a strong design story to carry throughout the space. The design concept, titled

“Into the Woods,” is bold and modern with the use of textured, rich, and deep materials. This sophisticated design aesthetic was accomplished with a neutral color palette, warm walnut wood applied and detailed in unexpected ways, and unique elements such as benches and cabinetry. Themes of nature ripple throughout the space - from the pragmatic symmetrical layout of spatial functions to the rich warmth of walnut paneling, moss wall art features, and earth-tone accents. Locally sourced wood veneer creates a large-scale marquetry pattern, giving homage to a traditional design style reinvigorated through a modern lens.

This office space’s crown jewel is the open client-facing and collaborative zone at the main entry. The floor plan was thoughtfully crafted around framing the supreme 360-degree downtown Portland views for this array of meeting spaces. This vignette draws visitors in from the elevator lobby as they approach the large glass door signifying the suite entry. Vast swaths of tall glazing allow for an unencumbered panoramic view framed by wood portals to signify the entries into the large conference room. Security was of utmost priority for the Ball Janik team. This was accomplished by creating a gentle divide between the public and private zones and enhanced by seamless technology throughout the space.

Flanking each side of the large conference room, LRS designed “jewel boxes” to serve a multifunctional purpose. Generally defined as a typical coffee area and lounge, these spaces act as impromptu zones for clients to have quick conversations with lawyers outside of the formal meeting areas. Wood encases the space and provides a warm and secure enclosure with LED wall sconce accents, plush colorful rugs, and calming views of the Willamette River beyond. Additional small and medium meeting spaces are provided throughout to capture any other spatial or technological needs.

Diverging from the traditional law office mentality, there is a high level of transparency along the office edge, eliminating barriers for inter-office communication and allowing the stunning views and daylight to be visible from the interior of the floor plate. These framed views of the Willamette River, the scattered city bridges, and a dazzling Mount Hood on good days are not reserved for the elite corner offices. They are celebrated destinations nestled at the ends of strategically placed “view corridors.” Cushioned bench seating positioned to capture these stunning vistas is open to all, providing much-needed individual respite away from the workstation or the perfect place for an intimate impromptu conversation. LRS and Ball Janik opted to maintain the traditional private offices elsewhere for health and safety reasons, staff comfort, and acoustical privacy during the now ever-popular ZOOM calls and teleconferences. Large relites allow daylight to puncture through the offices and bring light into the main circulation pathway encircling the space. The private offices are traditional in function but break the mold by embracing one size fits all. This approach foregoes traditional hierarchy office sizes found in most law firms.

A sizeable break room boasts top-of-the-line built-in appliances, a large island for gathering, elegant and playful light, and a colorful lounge niche. Textural wood slats form a geometric pattern and add dimension, echoing the marquetry elements and creating a cohesive design language. Multiple coffee areas are scattered throughout the floor plate to supplement the break room and encourage communication and collaboration. Counter to these public environments; an ample wellness room provides a sink and under-counter refrigerator, dimmable spa-like lighting, and clearance for a masseuse to provide services to the staff. The wellness room can serve multiple purposes as needed throughout the day.

The goal of “place the people first” is paramount now more than ever as the Ball Janik team starts to transition from an at-home model and return to the office. Recruitment and retention are on the top of many businesses’ minds. LRS set Ball Janik up for success by differentiating their office environment to welcome new and returning employees. From minimizing traditional hierarchy, access to daylight and views, elegance in materiality, and an emphasis on spatial usage, this a-typical law firm office design pushes the Ball Janik team forward as they continue to nurture cross-team interactions, fostering synergies, client focus, and creativity.

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