



Columbia College Chicago



Columbia College Chicago has created a striking and iconic campus identity from a collection of repurposed office buildings in Chicago's South Loop. On a tight budget, the college uses bold colors and creative accents along with a careful selection of Abak and Resolve systems for offices, and Q tables with Caper chairs for classrooms. Herman Miller classics furnish areas where students gather.

**EDUCATION/LIBRARY;
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS**

Topic:

*Brand
Environments
Sustainability*

Application:

*Informal Learning
Open Office
Private Office
Public Space/Lobby
Residence Hall*

Project Scope:

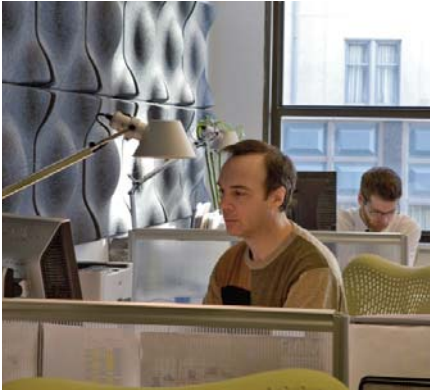
2 million square feet

Herman Miller Product:

*Abak® Environments
Resolve® System
Caper® Chairs
Eames® Molded Plywood Chairs
Mirra® Chairs
Nelson™ Swag Leg Group
Avive® Table Collection
Eames Tables
Meridian® Pedestals
Q™ Tables*

Year Completed:

2008



Columbia College Chicago is a study in paradox: a college without a defined campus; a private arts and media college that offers a generous admissions policy; a city school with a core value of sustainability; an institution that features strikingly innovative spaces created from little more than paint, carpet, creativity—and a judicious selection of Herman Miller furniture. Located in the heart of Chicago, Columbia College occupies an eclectic cluster of former office buildings and has created within them a recognizable campus and an innovative learning experience for a growing and diverse student body.

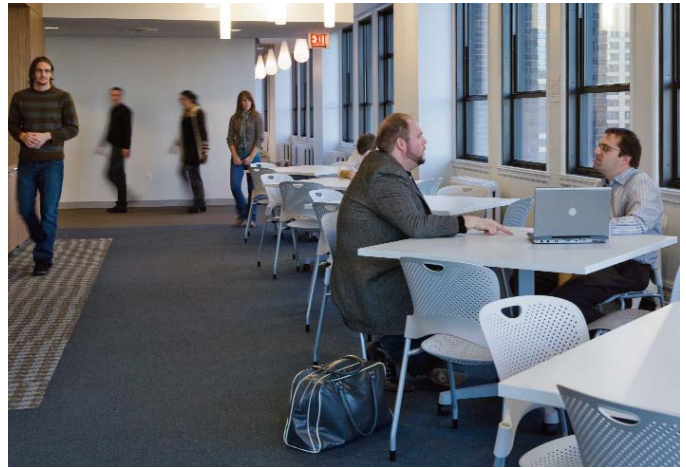
Until recently, the college had simply acquired distressed buildings in Chicago's South Loop and moved into them. Departments occupied the available space and furnished them from office supply catalogs with little attention paid to optimizing either the learning or the administrative environment.

But with growing enrollment, the college has had to reevaluate its image and use of space. "Now we're able to ask how we can grow in a smart way," says Joseph Leamanczyk, project manager for the Office of Campus Environment.

So, in partnership with Gensler, the architectural firm, the college has fashioned an iconic and recognizable image within its collection of repurposed office buildings, generally by stripping them to their core architectural features to "let the bones of the building sing," according to David Broz, architect, Gensler. Then, within a backdrop of bold colors and creative accents, a broad palette of Herman Miller furniture contributes understated design elegance as well as durable function. The result is stunning, vibrant spaces that communicate the college's mission "to author the culture of our times"—and that are highly functional as well.

From the classrooms to the hallways, these spaces educate. Students learn that good design not only looks beautiful, but that it should also be durable and comfortable. "We need a climate that fosters good design," says Mr. Leamanczyk. "When students live with it, they understand it better."

In the classroom, Herman Miller's Q table and Caper chairs are standard issue. Mobile and durable, they provide an unobtrusive support to the type of hands-on, collaborative learning that prepares students for the creative fields they will enter. "Q tables are a good workhorse product for us because they're easy to move and to reconfigure, and the Caper chair is very beautiful with a nice form," says Mr. Leamanczyk. He has also been "extremely happy" with the durability of both products.



For open plan and private offices, Columbia relies on the Resolve system and on Abak Environments. With crisp white and metallic finishes, these systems offer the clean, “unfussy” look Columbia prefers. Abak, for example, with its simple, European look is accessorized simply with a Meridian pedestal file and a Mirra chair. “There is no more true or honest system,” says Mr. Broz.

For older buildings, the Resolve system’s overhead wire management simplifies power delivery with a few ceiling drops. And both systems offer a far more collaborative environment than the rows of private offices the staff had occupied previously. To overcome the lack of a student union or central gathering spaces, Gensler designed colorful, comfortable niches and “front porches” in halls and elevator entrances where students can mingle and hang out. “What would be the sidewalk intersections in the quad of a rural campus occur at Columbia in the elevator lobbies,” says Mr. Broz. These areas feature bold colors and Herman Miller classics, such as Eames chairs and Nelson tables.

Environmental responsibility is a value Columbia also shares with Herman Miller. Early on, in its search for suppliers to support its green initiative, Columbia recognized that environmental stewardship was deeply embedded in Herman Miller’s culture and that its products would be consistent with that ethic. And for Columbia’s students that, too, becomes a learning experience. “We’ve taken students to Herman Miller’s GreenHouse facility, and they’re amazed at how this consciousness carries through to every aspect of production,” says Mr. Leamanczyk.

In addition to good design and beyond environmental leadership, Columbia has discovered that Herman Miller is also an economical choice. “Clients often think they can’t afford Herman Miller product,” says Gary Spangler, senior account manager, Interior Investments, a Herman Miller dealer. “Yet, we have products for the education markets at a mid-range price point with greater durability, performance, and style than those offered by educational suppliers.”

Aesthetics. Performance. Sustainability. Price. Columbia College has found that these qualities consistently make Herman Miller a solid choice for its discriminating and demanding applications.

Photography by Michelle Litvin

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