



Volkswagen Group of America



Volkswagen Group of America wanted its new headquarters near Washington, D.C., to support connections among employees while capturing the essence of both the Volkswagen and Audi brands. The Abak environments desking system from Herman Miller appealed to Volkswagen's European tastes and offered customization options that gave both brands a distinct identity from the same furniture.

**MANUFACTURING: OFFICES;
HERNDON, VIRGINIA**

Topic:

*Brand
Collaboration*

Application:

*Collaboration/Team
Open Office
Private Office*

Project Scope:

*500 occupants; 454 workstations,
49 private offices, 38 conference
rooms; 185,000 square feet*

Herman Miller Product:

*Abak® Environments
Meridian® Stackable Lateral Files
Meridian Storage Cases*

Program/Service:

Easy OptionsSM Capability

Year Completed:

2008



Fun and frugal might be the engine of Volkswagen's brand, but attention to detail is the fuel that keeps it humming. It's evident in Volkswagen cars, in Volkswagen showrooms, and now even in Volkswagen's North American headquarters.

That headquarters used to be in metropolitan Detroit, but now it's in suburban Washington, D.C. The German carmaker, Europe's largest, made the move to be closer to its U.S. customers, the vast majority of whom are on the East Coast.

Besides, the change of address presented Volkswagen with an ideal opportunity to align its office space with its corporate culture.

"We wanted an open, collaborative environment with detailing worthy of our brand," says Christopher Hahn, a general manager with Volkswagen Group of America. "Our goal was to create a space that would be distinctly Volkswagen."

There was just one hitch. Volkswagen's brand wasn't the only one space planners had to account for. That's because one floor of the six-story building was reserved for the North American headquarters of Audi, a Volkswagen sibling with a distinct brand image of its own—more premium and performance than fun and frugal.

"Our task was to answer the needs of both brands without creating two completely different environments," says Pablo Quintana, associate principal in the Washington office of VOA Associates Inc., the project architect. "The client wanted to create a unified presence, yet still reflect the unique brand identity of both Volkswagen and Audi."

THE EUROPEAN TOUCH

VOA met the challenge with the help of Abak environments, a Herman Miller desking system that appealed at once to VW and Audi decision makers—in part, perhaps, because it was originally developed for the European market.

Abak typicals for both VW and Audi position two employees back to back in an 8' x 24' space with a shared workwall and collaboration table. The 24-foot work surface linking



Volkswagen Headquarters

the colleagues produces a wide-open benching configuration characteristic of the cubicle-shunning layouts popular in Europe.

Herman Miller amplified Abak's international flair by combining U.S. and European components in a way found nowhere else. The workwall, for instance, is an Americanized approach to handling power and data—Abak applications in Europe commonly rely on raised flooring. Meanwhile, chrome scallop legs and anodized aluminum hardware are among the components typically available only in Europe.

This hybrid approach was further customized in just about every way possible with the help of Herman Miller's Easy Options capability.

"I've never worked on a project that had such a high degree of customization," says Michele Verity, director of business development at Chasen's Business Interiors, a Herman Miller dealer in Alexandria, Virginia. "We developed dozens and dozens of options—I stopped counting at 52."

A CUSTOM CAVALCADE

The most visible example of customization is the ubiquitous beech finish, a standard offering from Herman Miller subsidiary Geiger International. VOA specified it for the conference tables and private-office casegoods supplied by Geiger, then had it custom matched on Abak work surfaces, Meridian file fronts, and M-Wall movable walls (an alliance product).

Other custom touches abound throughout. One example: Meridian satellite storage banks are elevated above special legs that seem to make them float. Another: The M-Wall used to construct all private offices and conference rooms matches the Abak stations so well that the two products appear to have come off the same production line.

To distinguish the Audi brand, VOA took the Abak ambience up a notch on Audi's floor. Whereas Volkswagen favored beech wherever possible, for instance, Audi opted for



Audi Headquarters

ebonized cherry file fronts and screen inserts. Likewise, the painted metallic rail tiles on VW's Abak stations give way to anodized aluminum on Audi's. Result: Though the two brands use the same furniture, their respective workspaces look strikingly different—Volkswagen's more relaxed, Audi's more refined.


"Our intent was to capture the same feel that you might get from visiting our dealerships or driving our cars," Mr. Hahn says. "With Abak, we were able to accomplish that without losing the sense of openness and communication that are important to both brands."

Architecturally, the building's open aura is largely defined by a glass-sided staircase that zigzags through a soaring 80-foot atrium. Dubbed "the connector" by space planners, the staircase weaves culture and space by eliminating barriers between floors and facilitating spontaneous interaction.

That same concept of connection also trickles down to the furniture. The shared table in each Abak workstation, for instance, makes collaboration as easy as swiveling. Meanwhile, the Meridian satellite storage units are topped by a custom standing-height work surface to encourage impromptu leaning and meeting.

"Volkswagen and Audi consider their furniture to be an expression of their brands, not just a place to sit," Mr. Quintana says. "If their cars aspire to be the best-crafted, best-engineered in the world, they figure their workspace should meet equally high standards."

Photography by: Nick Merrick, Hedrich Blessing

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