

An Oasis in the Desert: Johnson, Jacobson Wilcox

When your new building is submitted for recognition by the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties, you know you must've done something right.

That is the feeling of pride and accomplishment that the partners at Johnson Jacobson Wilcox recently experienced when learning that their office was worthy of such acclaim. "We wanted to establish a presence in a different way, so we built our office on a major thoroughfare where there is a lot of traffic and a good deal of new development taking place. We wanted to make an impression on the business community," said managing partner Gary Johnson, "and we also wanted our staff to know that we are completely committed to providing them with a great place to work." The building gives the firm a competitive edge, and enables them to send a strong message to the staff and clients.

The firm partners and architect Jeff Dacks approached the task from a unique angle. The first thing that Jeff needed to establish was what image the firm wanted to project to staff, clientele, prospects, recruits, and referral sources. He asked them probing questions such as: "Who are you? What are your objectives? What is the culture of your firm? How do your teams work together?"

Jeff analyzed the flow of people, work, and visitors, as well as the on-going interaction between the professional and support staff. The results helped him diagram where people should be placed for most efficiency for manned and unmanned areas, but also addressed other significant issues. CPAs sit in front of computer screens all day, so Jeff integrated indirect lighting systems designed to reduce eye strain and fatigue while encouraging better posture. This is important to Johnson Jacobson Wilcox because this environment supports happier employees, and helps in limiting work errors which results in more satisfied clients and ultimately, greater profitability.

The building is very open and awash in natural light while overcoming the distinctive challenges of the

desert climate. In order to control solar radiation, the windows are recessed, allowing the building to provide shade and protection during the summer. In the winter, the sun's rays hit the windows at a lower angle, penetrating the glass and warming the facility. The heating and cooling systems and controls are zoned in order to compliment the natural heating and cooling that takes place as the sun moves around the building throughout the day.

While simulated technology allowed these improvements, the designers and the partners never lost sight of the most important ingredient, the human element. Love of nature is recognized in the spaces that appear to open to the outdoors at the end of the halls and in the commitment to provide everyone with an outdoor view, bringing the beauty of the landscaped desert garden indoors. Interior offices are situated in view of nearby windows, while skylights add to the sense of open space.

The partners have a goal of achieving a high level of professionalism in the firm, so there are a minimum number of cubicles in the new building, offering the privacy and stature that accompanies individual offices. "This building is a tool that has made it possible for us to create positive attitudes with our staff," said Gary Johnson. "What we are hearing is that this is a great place to work, and that was our objective."

To finish the project, they hired a consultant to help them acquire and place original art pieces that would be sophisticated yet bold, reflecting the philosophy of their young firm, providing a sense of beauty without detracting from the professional reputation that the firm enjoys.

They took advantage of every opportunity to add the human touch and to capture the wonder of nature. The complete integration of timeless, classic beauty with high tech efficiency is what distinguishes this new building. It is one of the best marketing tools that they could have ever hoped for!