

Shared Workspaces: Blend Experience with Enchantment



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Arriving in 2005, the coworking model of shared workspaces is still perceived by most as a rented desk in a sea of solopreneurs and startups, but today it's so much more than the cliché of “free coffee and beer on tap.” After a decade overwhelmingly defined by a minimalist aesthetic with cool colors and millennial members, new coworking spaces are taking a bold, maximalist approach to the everyday featuring thoughtful design inspired by local influences and curated amenities tailored to individual locations.

Infusing the workday with greater flexibility, enjoyment and multifunctional spaces, this transformation within the shared workspace toward saturated, experience-based design has resonated with a new population and more generations of workers. It also has helped new coworking spaces capitalize on demand created by the pandemic, as corporate offices extend remote work policies with more than 1.87 billion professionals forecasted to seek coworking spaces by 2022 (IWG, 2020 Coworking Report).

While copy-paste footprints and catalogue-order furniture can provide a consistent offering, the experience can be underwhelming and forgettable. A foundational element powering the coworking transformation is the feeling that a place can be inspired by its history, but not anchored down by it.

Looking toward the boutique hotel as inspiration for the workspace, we see services and amenities are concierge-focused, “guest-first,” need- or demand-based, and flexible to allow for transition from day to evening (work to event) in the most efficient footprint. This mix of hospitality, data-driven thinking is also effective in coworking spaces whose tenants likely have chosen a space with a shorter commute and amenities that can provide not only support for the business, but the social amenity missing in the home office. As the pandemic paved the way for workers to favor suburban, mountain and even rural locations for their Zoom calls in a grand urban exodus from major metropolitan destinations, we see the shared workspace as a link between the value of proximity and professionalism.

With the hospitality-focused mentality, shared workspace developers and designers are creating value through rich, inviting, experienced-based environments that embody that hotel lobby energy. Weaving in principles of biophilic design and wellness initiatives also help this new category of coworking spaces elevate above their competition, making the appeal to leave the corporate or home office that much more enticing.

Unlike the uncertainty in real estate trends facing traditional office space, coworking square footage is on track to increase more than 71% by 2025 (Coworker, 2019 Special Coworking Insights). The most successful spaces will be tailored to members, taking into account the longevity it will serve them. Newly remote or flexible office professionals are seeking a space designed with them in mind. We've seen some of this member-centric transformation already with spaces dedicated to women and some even specific to pet owners.

Coworkers themselves are maturing, often in company management positions and able to work remotely



JC Buck
Shift Littleton: The boutique hotel can inspire the workplace.

as an integral team member, or leaving a Fortune 500 company to launch a consulting career – likely while also raising families and taking on additional roles in their local community. Different shared workspace brands and models appeal to different demographics and shifts in corporate culture mentality.

“We’re seeing a number of memberships from dual-income households who find juggling their child’s remote learning within the workday nearly impossible, as well as from businesses that want flexibility for their employees,” said Grant Barnhill, founder/CEO of Shift Workspaces.

“Our members want to work hard, they want to contribute to their communities, and they want to have fun doing it.”

We worked with Barnhill on his most recent coworking project, Shift Littleton, 20 minutes outside of downtown Denver, amidst the agricultural lineage that still peppers historic main street.

We paid homage to this lineage through a thoughtfully crafted curation of materials, furniture, art, and a broadened net on the agricultural story.

We sought to embrace the boutique hotel and members-only philosophies with an engaging experience that carries from your first step into the lobby to your office door and the shared spaces in between.

We also were interested in the idea of discovery, letting the space unfold and reveal itself to the guest the more one uses it. The library conference room features a full-size floor lamp in the shape of a horse, Oaxaca artist murals line the walls, and antique furniture pieces were given a new life and purpose throughout. While object and art curation is a primary focus at Shift Littleton, the design team prioritized intentional spaces that allowed for what Barnhill describes as “intuitive hospitality.”

“It’s a natural extension of caring about others to actually care for them,” he said. “We are a local B-Corp company that provides space and services to other local companies. We want our members to feel a holistic approach to their well-being, and give them a space where they can be creative, productive and also be supported and happier doing it.”

Members will come for their day job, but engage in the community through wellness offerings such as yoga, meditation, a colleague’s happy hour or spontaneous networking. Massage, wellness and meditation rooms are some of the most commonly used spaces at Shift, but Barnhill says that it takes time for members to adapt.

While many coworking offices seem to be designed with a minimalist approach for the millennial guest, the reality is that setting begins to feel unfulfilling. As an interior designer, I believe an inspiring space inspires new ideas, new thinking, new expectations – where we have more measurements for success. The future of coworking is here, full of luxury, full of service amenities and full of community. \\\



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Shift Littleton: The library conference room features a full-size floor lamp in the shape of a horse.