

INTERIOR DESIGN



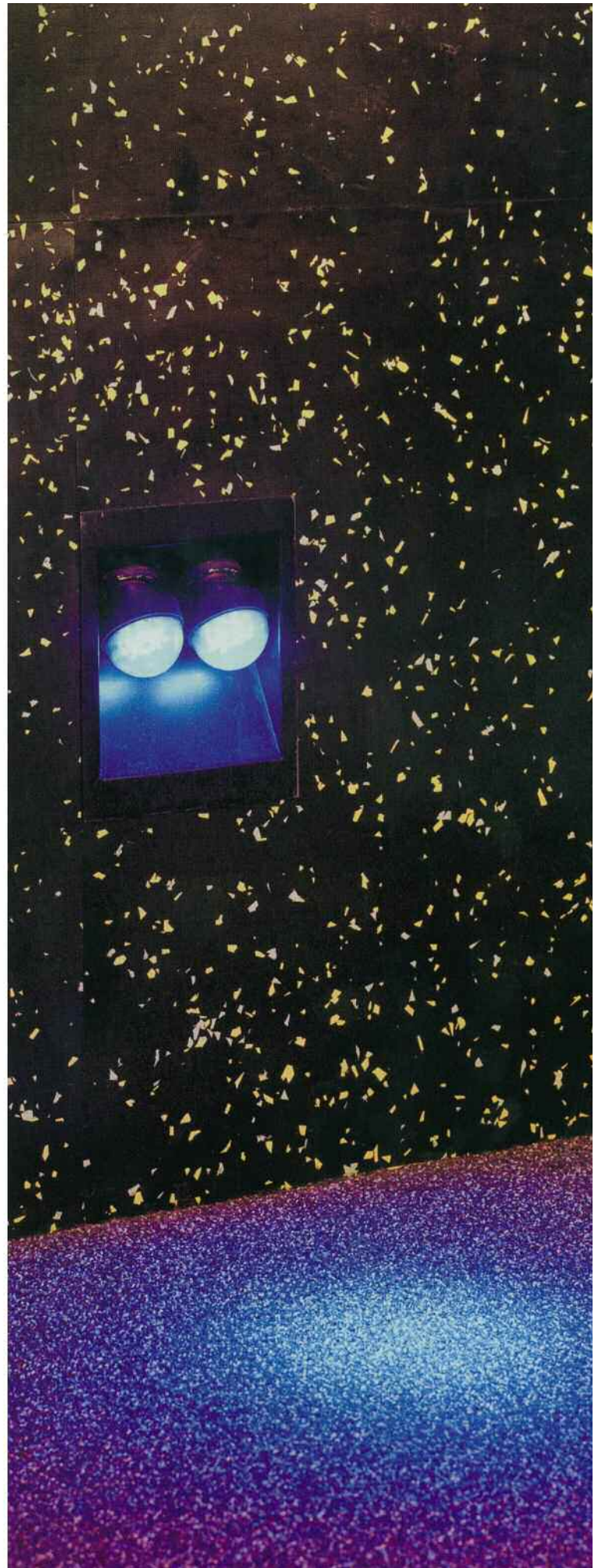
Some Nerve!

Neurons provide the thematic inspiration for Lee H. Skolnick's design of a telecommunications firm in New York

ASKED TO DESCRIBE their preferred business environment, some high-tech types might vote for rough-and-ready spaces, such as warehouses or garages, to confer an image of venturesomeness. Others might seek a conventional milieu suggesting stability and corporate strength, preferably at a quality address such as Wall Street. A certain telecommunications company, however, shunned both extremes for its New York office, seeking instead a balance of the two: an industrial but sophisticated ambience within a financial-district high-rise.

The client had two requests for architect Lee H. Skolnick, whose namesake firm was enlisted for the job: to deliver capacious, open-plan surroundings and to project a "new face" in line with the forward-thinking personality of the vanguard business. The task of designing, producing, and fine-tuning was left up to the architect entirely.

Skolnick's brief encompassed two floors, each 22,000 square feet, in a 1970s office tower by I.M. Pei. Skolnick had admired the building since his school days, and he says he's still drawn to its "natural purity and simplicity." His favorite element seems to be the enormous windows, more than 24 feet wide and 7 feet high, all with clear glazing unencumbered by mullions or frames. Inside the space in question, though, the vista was less appealing. →





Leftovers from previous occupants—nonsupportive partitions, suspended ceilings, standard lighting, and the like—were jettisoned so the architect could start from scratch.

Skolnick follows self-imposed rules about practicing his profession and formulating ideas. He avoids generalities, focusing instead on attaining a true understanding of both the clients' ways of thinking and the means and methods for producing the end product. Thus he talked extensively with the CEO of the company, immersed himself in its promotional dicta and data, and resolved to determine what distinguishes it from its competition—and how to play up that feature visually.

As Skolnick pursued his quest, he was struck by the distinct corollary between digital electronics and nervous systems. Both make everything tick and click. And so, eureka! Nerves became news. Central to the design are 13 purely decorative neuronlike forms, each ranging from 20 to 40 feet long and drifting below the ceiling plane. The sinuous forms, no two exact duplicates, are composed of aluminum rods held together by elliptical MDF ribs and wrapped in stretchy white mesh. Fiber-optic fibrils threaded through the carapace cast a steady, soft glow. Stainless-steel cables connect each form to the 11-foot-high ceiling slab. The sum total amounts to an organic concept, not a modular system.

Another important ingredient of Skolnick's scheme is the pervasive lightness, in terms of both wattage and weightlessness. In addition to the big, bare windows, layers of transparent and translucent materials ease and spread the flow of natural brightness: clear and frosted glazing at executive offices, stranded fiberglass for other gathering spaces, colored-resin stair treads, and the fishnetlike synthetic mesh for the levitating neurons. Enclosing the main boardroom, floor-to-ceiling glazing densely textured at the base gradually segues into slightly sanded →

Previous spread, left: Polished-steel stairs with cast-resin treads connect breakout lounges on both floors of a telecommunications company's New York office, designed by Lee H. Skolnick.

Previous spread, right: In contrast to the open work spaces, the core area is treated as a solid, dense entity. It is encased in rubber sheeting flecked with the firm's yellow and blue logo colors.

Above: The boardroom's sandblasted glass enclosure segues from translucent at the base to clear on top. Slim vertical door pulls mark entrances.

Left: Teknion's Transit system workstations in the main office area.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Fiberglass panels enclose a conference room on the upper level. A waiting area, also on the upper floor, is furnished with Cappellini chairs. Another conference room reiterates the interplay of translucency and transparency. Fiberglass panels curve around the reception desk.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER AARON/ESTO

and finally clear, unadulterated glass. Staffers at workstations enjoy daylight filtering through the open-plan layout; semiprivate offices are fronted with textured glass panels as well as sliding doors of honeycombed aluminum sandwiched between acrylic sheets. In stark contrast, the core mechanicals area is dense and dark, sheathed in black Italian rubber flecked with yellow and blue, the company logo's colors.

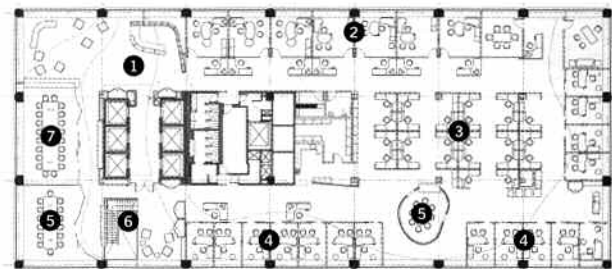
At the client's request, breakout areas on both levels are linked by stairs that become an arresting sculptural element in their own right. The structure is of polished steel, and the translucent cast-resin treads are embedded with steel disks. Looped railings add a whoosh of motion, another visual metaphor for the swift synaptic activity at the heart of the firm's mission. —Monica Geran

Opposite: The staircase features stainless-steel looped railings and resin treads embedded with steel disks.

From top: Semiprivate offices, fronted by fixed glass panels and sliding doors of honeycombed aluminum sandwiched between acrylic sheets. The corridor past the boardroom. Inside the boardroom, which seats 20 at a pigmented concrete tabletop.

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WOODWORKING: **PETERSEN GELLER SPURGE**. SUSPENDED CEILING SCULPTURES, RECEPTION DESK: **DIMENSIONAL COMMUNICATIONS**. NOGUCHI TABLES: **MODERNICA**. STOOLS: **ALLERMUIR**. STAIRS: **NEWCO IRONWORKS**. TREADS: **ATTA**. WORKSTATIONS: **TEKNION**. LIGHTING DESIGN: **RENFRO DESIGN GROUP**. RUBBER WALL: **ALLSTATE RUBBER**. CARPET: **LEES CARPET**. TABLE BASE (BOARDROOM): **DATESWEISER**. CONCRETE FLOORING, BOARDROOM TABLETOP: **GET REAL SURFACES**. GLASS: **CARVART GLASS**. HONEYCOMB PANELS: **EURO-COMPOSITES**. ENGINEER: **MGJ ASSOCIATES**. STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: **SAGE GROUP**. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: **VANGUARD CONSTRUCTION**.



- 1 RECEPTION
- 2 EXECUTIVE OFFICES
- 3 WORKSTATIONS
- 4 SEMIPRIVATE OFFICES
- 5 CONFERENCE ROOMS
- 6 STAIR
- 7 BOARDROOM

