

THE WAY WE WORK

AND THE ENVIRONMENTS THAT BEST SUPPORT IT

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One of my first stops in LA was a visit to the Herman Miller showroom where I was able to have a tour of the showroom and their workspaces, and have a great discussion about today's changing workplace with (Julie Shimizu, in charge of Customer Experience for Herman Miller).

The Santa Monica showroom was completed in 2011 using an old 1956 warehouse. Herman Miller worked with architect Steve Clem to specify local and recycled materials. HM uses the space as a working showroom: there are a number of people who work in the space but not a single desk or workstation that belongs to any one employee. All of the spaces are shared and all of the spaces are also on display. This means no pictures of adorable kids, no knick-knacks, and no leaving a pile of papers to deal with in the morning. It also means a variety of (often adjustable) work spaces to accommodate different modes of work - always clean, clear, and ready for use.

The ideas of today's changing workplace (which HM addresses in their Living Office campaign) have been discussed and researched for a long time but (somewhat oddly) are only now being fully implemented into practice at Herman Miller. As HM puts the ideas and research behind the Living Office to work at all of Herman Miller's offices, the changes are being met varying receptions in different cities and work environments.





Technology is making it possible for many offices to move to both a paperless and a cubicle-free environment. Years of habit and tradition push against some of these changes. Some level of initial resistance to giving up one's personal workstation is unsurprisingly common. But, although there is a valid need for privacy in some work situations, there is not a valid need for territoriality. Phones, tablets and online storage have the potential to make performing many work tasks possible from nearly any location and also eliminate the need for most paper (and therefore physical storage space). And if we need less storage space, and aren't tied

to a desktop computer for every task, there is no longer a need for a traditional workstation or cubicle.

After collecting months of data at Herman Miller's DC office and showroom (counting actual time spend sitting in each chair and at each desk) Herman Miller was able to halve the overall size of their studio and reduce the number of workstations to just 1 workstation for every 3 employees. Freeing up space traditionally taken by bulky, limited-use workstations or cubicles gives offices room to build in more multi-functional and flexible workspaces including lounge set-ups and meeting spaces. Not only do these spaces bring more possibilities for more attractive furniture and designs, they can be specifically crafted to support more interactive, creative work environments and increase productivity no matter what type of work the office supports.

Perhaps most interesting to me is that Herman Miller chose to re-release mid-century furniture at 2013 Neo-Con in support of their Living Office campaign. Although technology continues to change and the need for wire management and furniture that supports those changes will continue to be important, many of the pieces of furniture that best fit a more flexible work environment were designed and built 50-60 years ago. Was

mid-century furniture already better at this "new" concept of a living office? Did designers like the Eameses, working across multiple design fields, lead to a better understanding of a living office type arrangement?

My favorite space at the Herman Miller showroom was the Parlor. Set up more like a residential living space, this area felt authentic, reflected the HM brand, and was both inviting and functional. It is where I most easily envisioned myself working on emails, meeting with clients or brainstorming projects with co-workers. Perhaps this feeling (and function) was connected to the fact that this space was the most

dedicated to classic pieces from HM's catalogue. It felt fresh and current, but could have been furnished almost identically had HM build this space 60 years ago.

