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UNIQUE CEILING HATCHES CREATIVITY AT TECH INCUBATOR

Case Study: Techport @ The Airport (California, MD)

Architectural Designer: Eileen Bildman, Studio 2 Design (Hollywood, MD)

GRATON, CA, 2018-12-11 – When Studio 2 Design was selected to design Techport @ The Airport, the new business incubator at St. Mary’s County Airport about 60 miles south of Washington D.C., designer Eileen Bildman researched other incubators throughout the country and saw a lot of what she *did not* want to build.

“They looked like a bunch of closets in a row going down a hallway. That’s not very inviting for anyone to come into, for a client to visit, or for working with other people, she says. “I decided, instead, to create a place that looked and functioned like a cutting-edge contemporary office, with an inviting feel, collaborative spaces, and a sense of openness and transparency. “



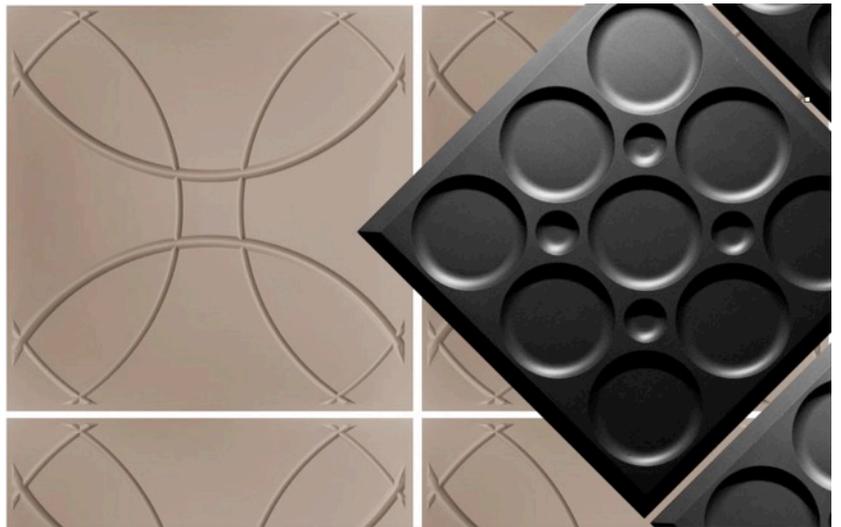
On the exterior, the 6,000-sf Techport is similar to many of the airport’s other buildings, a pre-engineered metal building system made a bit less industrial by the inclusion of large windows and a stylish, techy canopy over the main entrance. On the interior, it is a different experience. “It’s a modern aesthetic,” says Bildman, “with very clean lines, a lot of glass, and some dark wood on walls.”

The interior is dominated by a large, open-office space that can host up to 15 start-up and early stage companies. The open-office atmosphere is similar to the office designs of many large corporations.

Bringing together the open space is a strongly-patterned suspended ceiling made of thermoformed ceiling panels produced by Ceilume. It is designed using two contemporary styles of panel in different colors. The main field is latte-colored Ceilume Orb. In the middle of the space is a sharply contrasting recessed ceiling area, rotated 45 degrees off the surrounding grid, of black Ceilume Roman Circles. The thermoformed vinyl panels are installed in a conventional 24" x 24" suspended ceiling grid painted to match the panel colors.

The floor reflects the ceiling design in negative, with a square of light wood-grain vinyl tile directly beneath the black ceiling, surrounded by darker tiles throughout the room.

In addition to the open area, there are two small conference rooms and one large conference room, as well as two small offices and a large management/executive office for the staff that will supports the start-ups. Most of the interior partitions are floor-to-ceiling glass, and transmit daylight from into the building's interior.



An important design consideration was acoustic control. In an open office with multiple businesses operating simultaneously, privacy and speech clarity are significant concerns. It was resolved by using noise-reducing ceiling panels and the cushioned vinyl flooring (to dampen footsteps) to effectively tame the room's noise level and reverberation.

The thin vinyl ceiling panels act as a diaphragm that transfers room noise into the cavity above the ceiling; there, acoustic vibrations are dampened by the viscous mass of air, an effect enhanced by the addition of sound-absorbing material above the panels.

"We had a grand opening with 150 people in the building," recalls Bildman. "All of them laughing and talking, with women in high heels and men with big voices; I was thinking, 'this would be the true test.' It worked brilliantly. You could easily have a conversation with a group of people."



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The budget for Techport – which was funded by Technology Transfer Office of the Naval Air Warfare Center, Aircraft Division to encourage transfer into the commercial sector of technologies developed by the military – was not exorbitant.

Bildman leveraged the ceiling as a designable surface – the fifth wall – to great effect. The Ceilume panels enabled her to focus the space visually in a dramatic way, at no more cost than an ordinary acoustic ceiling. “During design, I got a lot of different opinions on this would work. Now everybody’s thrilled about it. When visitors walk in, they just love the ceiling. Something that would never draw your attention in a typical commercial building is now something that gets your attention immediately. They walk in and go ‘Wow.’”

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ABOUT CEILUME

Ceilume is the leading manufacturer of thermoformed ceiling tiles and panels. The company's predecessor dates from the early 20th Century and was a pioneer in the invention of the modern suspended ceiling. The family-owned business is located in Graton, CA in the heart of California's wine country, and occupies a historic apple-packing warehouse. With an eye on the future, Ceilume has invested in advanced manufacturing equipment and an active R+D program to create improved ceiling and wall finishes to meet changing environmental, performance, and aesthetic expectations. www.ceilume.com

MORE INFORMATION AND INTERVIEWS

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