

HBO Seattle

Rapt Studio merges the language and materials of Seattle's heritage into an innovative workspace for a software engineering group



Amenities, including casual seating, are adjacent to stairs on each floor. Here, soft seating is in the reception area.

By Sam Lubell
Photography by
Eric Laignel

Seeking more nuance than the usual creative open workplace, HBO engaged Rapt Studio to design an eclectic, forward-looking environment for the Seattle office of its Code Labs—a software engineering group—that would both spur and enhance innovation and interaction.

The HBO Code Labs, located in Seattle and New York, are not typical for either the entertainment or technology industries. Software professionals here are developing the next level of entertainment products and interactive experiences across devices, such as smartphones, tablets, game consoles, and computers.

"These are the folks who are reengineering entertainment. It made sense to reimagine how they worked," says David Galullo, CEO of Rapt Studio, which is based in San Francisco and Los Angeles. This HBO creative office is designed to enable the agile development process with a multitude of options for seating, conversations, and serendipitous meetings, with a high level of flexibility.

Taking cues from Seattle's maritime history HBO Seattle spans 72,000 total square feet on the top three floors of a midrise downtown office building, with floor-to-ceiling windows that capture city views. Rapt Studio conceived an aesthetic that merges the language and materials of the city's heritage with the innovation taking place inside.

"They're very proud of being in Seattle," Galullo says of the HBO employees there. References to the city's industrial and maritime history include elevator bank installations featuring dozens of hanging ropes, raw steel surfaces surrounding stairways, ball-shaped lights that

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A rope installation (right) hangs from the ceiling of the elevator lobby. The reception area (below) is adjacent to the communicating stair. LED light bars located under benches and felt lampshades help to give a residential feel to open seating areas (opposite two).

evoked buoys, light-hued timber floors, concrete columns, wood ceiling beams, as well as exposed metal ducts and wiring.

To promote employee interaction between the three levels, Rapt cut openings into the floor plates and designed large communicating stairs. Adjacent to the stairs on each floor, amenities are catalysts for interaction, including a reception area, a cafe, demo rooms, and a game room.

Light fixtures, such as long, glowing LED light bars located under benches and along ceilings, bring a soft, residential touch to the office environment. Acoustically friendly felt lampshades are suspended above open seating areas.

Reconfigurable and interactive

Furnishings are contemporary. Desks that can be easily moved allow employees to reconfigure their work areas, and a raised floor was installed on each level to maximize flexibility for power and HVAC. For the open office zones, located between the stairs and the perimeter of each floor, Rapt specified movable bench-style furniture that can be tailored to each creative group. Along the periphery of each floor, Rapt effectively merged long halls lined by whiteboards—enabling developers to visually talk through a problem—with open seating areas, small niches, meeting spaces, and collaboration zones. Interaction can occur at all times in most locations.

"We built on the psyche of how people commit to meetings or not," Galullo says. "People can perch informally. And, in a way, we're bringing conversations in the hall into the meeting room. Conversation is something we always try to capture." Desks and tables in the collaboration spaces, for example,



HBO Seattle

Architect and Interior
Designer: **Rapt Studio**

Client: **HBO**

Where: **Seattle**

What: **72,000 total square
feet on three floors**

Cost/Est: **Withheld
at client's request**

For a full project source
list, see page 130 or visit
contractdesign.com.





are bar height to enable those passing by to easily drop into a meeting or conversation.

To get away from all this interactivity, the firm designed distinct spaces, referred to as libraries, which allow for solitary work that "doesn't feel like you're locked in a closet." The variety and flexibility of the interior helps to create a "sense of discovery and evolution as people move through the space," says Galullo, who adds that HBO leaders have remained "advocates for using 'etcetera' space in the way that it was designed."

Gilman Wong, senior vice president for digital products design and engineering at HBO, is excited that the design "projects a strong sense of HBO" and reflects its embrace of technology and fresh outlook. More importantly, Wong loves the design's impact on the ability for teams to collaborate on large projects that draw upon a broad cross section of staff members. **e**





Key Design Highlights

A communicating stair, which connects all three levels is adjacent to areas that lend themselves to high levels of interaction.

References to Seattle's industrial and maritime history include hanging ropes in the elevator lobby, raw steel surfaces, ball-shaped lights, timber and wood surfaces, and exposed mechanical systems.

Employees can easily reconfigure work areas with movable bench-style furniture and raised flooring.

Whiteboards line meeting rooms and hallways to encourage ideas and conversation.

Library-like spaces, which allow for solitary work, are designed to promote a sense of discovery.



Round pendants and rope-like lights (above and left) evoke Seattle's maritime history, while wood and timber details (opposite, top) reference its natural ecology. Whiteboards line hallways (opposite, bottom) to promote interaction at any time.