



In Portland, Oregon, Hacker designs a workplace that embodies the essence of a company that is all about simplified banking for a new generation



By raising part of the raised access flooring, the designers created a series of sunken living room-like gathering areas, known as hearths, which feature glulam wood bench seating to accommodate meetings or employee gatherings.

Simple

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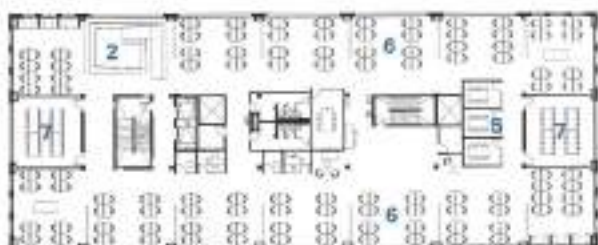
The eight-year-old company Simple endeavors to make banking transactions, well, simple. Headquartered in Portland, Oregon, the company has developed an entirely online system accessible through a website or mobile app. With this business model and name, it is only fitting that the company's new office highlights straightforward simplicity.

Designed by locally based Hacker to feel homelike, the Simple workplace challenges what can often be a conservative banking culture. Simple's more than 300 employees work on the top four floors of a new six-story mass timber building located in the burgeoning Central Eastside district of Portland—an area populated with a blend of traditional industrial businesses and an increasing number of new-economy tech and creative companies. In accommodating Simple's quickly growing workforce, the challenge was to maintain the openness the company had enjoyed in its previous Portland space.

"Simple has always had an open layout. When I started, our CEO sat in a desk next to me," says Mel Snyder, the company's manager of office administration. "We wanted everyone to sit together for that collaborative feel you'd have at a startup of under 100 people—to have casual interactions and meeting spots, and to preserve the ability to randomly run into each other and to have cross-pollination. It was about keeping us connected even as we're spread out."

Creating a serene workplace

The building's mass timber framing of exposed glulam Douglas fir beams and columns was the starting point for Hacker's design. The minimal material palette further emphasizes the interior wood structure. "We were able to reduce [the design strategy] to a single word: hone," says Jennifer Fowler, a principal with Hacker. "[Simple's leaders and employees] are very down-to-earth. They didn't want anything that felt like it was flashy or some over-the-top amenity. They just wanted a really



Fourth Floor Plan



Sixth Floor Plan



Third Floor Plan



Fifth Floor Plan

- 1 Reception
- 2 Sunken living room
- 3 Break room
- 4 Dining area
- 5 Conference room
- 6 Open office area
- 7 Training room
- 8 Quiet room
- 9 Roof deck





Simple

Architect and interior Designer **Hacker**

Client **Simple Finance**

Where **Portland, Oregon**

What **81,300 total square feet on four floors**

Cost/ft **\$113**

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serene place to come to work, and room to personalize. So we were, in a way, trying to create a backdrop for them to do their thing."

Some of the building's limitations presented a challenge for the designers to achieve openness. Ceiling beams had a greater depth than initially expected, dipping lower than the tops of the windows. It was a very compressed feeling on the floors," Fowler says. "From an interior standpoint, that's a challenge."

Hearths as gathering areas

Even so, the designers found ways to gain back height and transparency. While an early concept to cut an open stairway into the middle of the floors proved too costly, the designers were able to clad a prominent staircase in glass. At one corner of floors three, four, and five, the designers also created more vertical depth by removing part of the raised access flooring to create sunken living room-like gathering areas, known as hearths, which were designed with Douglas fir flooring and bench seating to accommodate casual meetings or employee gatherings. The glass-enclosed stairway, which also allows for those seated in the hearths to easily view people passing from floor to floor, includes a multistory mural of a tree. The painting is one of several in the workspace, all of which were created by local artists to enliven the space.

The Hacker design takes advantage of the building's ceiling beams to create a rhythm of smaller spaces, such as conference rooms, informal

While Hacker's deck plywood clad the reception desk (right), the custom exterior panels emphasize the building's more timber framing, as seen in the break room (below) and along the hearths and open work areas (opposite).



Key Design Highlights

The minimal interior palette emphasizes the building's mass timber framing of Douglas fir beams and columns.

At the corners of three floors, portions of raised access flooring were removed to create sunken living room-like gathering areas known as hearths.

Fabric scrims provide acoustic mitigation and help to further define spaces.

Lighting, furniture, and rugs convey a sense of craft and make informal meeting areas feel homelike.

A glass-enclosed stairway allows a connection between floors and includes a multistory mural of a tree.



meeting spots, and intimate phone booth-like cubbyholes. Fabric scrims hang from several of the beams for acoustic mitigation and to define spaces. Besides the Douglas fir of the structure and in the hearth areas, the other wood is white Russian birch plywood, used for the reception desk, all booths, island locker storage, and built-in window benches and storage.

Furnishings with a sense of craft

Lighting, furniture, and rugs were selected to enhance the casual feel with a sense of craft. Sit-stand desks also feature custom-designed three-sided enclosures that help to create a sense of privacy in the otherwise open office. On the top floor, an expensive roof deck is accessible through accordion doors from both a large conference room and a game room.

A number of sustainable solutions were incorporated, including daylight for all workspaces, operable windows, occupancy sensors for electric lighting, and the use of end-grain wood flooring made from recycled lumber from the Pacific Northwest.

In the end, the new interior has furthered Simple's business initiatives in multiple ways. "It's been very successful," Snyder says. "And it has absolutely helped with recruiting."



Informal meeting spots (left, below, and opposite, top) feature soft seating, rugs, and other furnishings that are imbued with a sense of craft. Built-in benches against the walls provide places to sit as well as storage. Felt-shaded pendants hang in a large conference room (opposite, bottom), where fabric screens provide privacy when needed against glass walls. An expansive roof deck (opposite, middle) is accessible to staff.

