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Taslimi

Barbara Barry creates smart, tailored offices for Michael Ovitz's latest enterprise, the Artists Management Group.

Power Play

THE STORY OF MICHAEL OVITZ is the stuff of Hollywood legend. From his humble beginnings in the William Morris Agency mailroom, Ovitz rose through the ranks of the entertainment world to build his own fiefdom with the Creative Artists Agency. During his 20 years at the talent agency's helm, he was frequently cited as the most powerful man in Hollywood. Evidence of his success was ubiquitous. To symbolize CAA's pre-eminence, Ovitz commissioned I.M. Pei to build the company's headquarters in Beverly Hills at Wilshire and Santa Monica boulevards. In October of 1995, he left his agency to become president of Disney. Fourteen months later, following a well-publicized split, Ovitz was back in the talent business. His new agency, the Artists Management Group, of course required suitable offices. Ovitz, no stranger to the worlds of architecture and design, again did his homework. Barbara Barry, he determined, was the right person for the AMG job.

The designer and her team were challenged to create a bit of magic with AMG's 22,000-sq.-ft. office located in a '60s-era structure clad in white marble. While the building's architecture is generally undistinguished, it nevertheless evokes a particular moment in design history. Barry, along with project architect Brad Caplow, decided that the AMG installation would, first of all, be in keeping with the spirit of the building's origins. Iconic Knoll products and SOM projects of the era served as general reference points. →



Cover: Reception area contains two seating groups anchored by islands of deep-blue carpeting, the only deviation from the brown-and-white scheme. Columns provide a screen between this public zone and the workplace beyond.

PHOTOGRAPHY: TOSHI YOSHIMI

They envisioned AMG as a powerful man's portrait, achieved through a restricted palette of colors (brown and white) and materials. Built from what Barry terms "simple choices" of wenge, white Carrara marble, glass, and stainless steel, the office is a restrained backdrop for the company's staff, its clients, and a splendid photography collection. Barry's solution communicates qualities of strength and solidity. "It's about integration, not lamination," she says. A seamless plaster ceiling and custom-dyed carpet run throughout the space as the basic envelope components. Wenge millwork and white drywall (interrupted by expanses of clear glass for transparency) articulate a floor plate with sweeping vistas and a sense of easy circulation.

The plan, devised to accommodate personnel numbering from 40 to 50, is a clear response to the building's architecture. Private offices are arrayed at the perimeter; assistants sit at long work station expanses in front. A corner conference room is located at the end of a boomerang-shaped wall, while Ovitz's office is at the opposite corner behind the reception zone. There is, how-

ever, one unusual aspect to the scheme. Occupying center stage, rather than some hidden corner, is a media room defined by two solid wenge walls and two sides of transparent glass. The glass not only offers visual relief from the dark wood, but also translates Ovitz's vision of an open space filled with energy.

Similarly, the reception zone addresses issues of transparency and activity. Caplow defined the area through a right-angle configuration of closely aligned columns that separate public spaces and private work zones. The effect is that of a screen allowing limited visual access between the two regions. Hints of action behind the screen, he comments, "are reminiscent of the flickering of film."

With its few strong architectural gestures, its subtle interplay of textures, and its judicious deployment of photography, AMG presents "an interesting take on neutrality," according to Barry. Its monolithic quality respects the site and it works for the client. Proof of commitment to the new office and its designer comes from AMG's decision to take over the floor below and to re-commission Barry's team for the job.

Following clear-cut programming, the fast-track design was conceived in two-and-a-half weeks and developed in an equally brief time frame. The project was immediately green-lit.

The BBI team included project manager Thomas Michna and interior design project manager Dennis Pastor. Kirkpatrick Associates was architect of record. —Edie Cohen

Below: Ceiling in the conference room was lowered to the height of the windows, 7-ft.-10-in., giving the enclosure a horizontal emphasis. The 25-ft. by 7-ft. table has a white Carrara marble top.

Back Cover: Ovitz's office, the sanctum sanctorum, contains work and meeting zones. Artwork includes a Robert Rauschenberg from Ovitz's collection. The bronze cocktail table is by artist Joel Shapiro. Here and throughout the office, the lounge seating, pull-up chairs, and wenge casegoods were custom designed by BBI.

CARPET: BENTLEY. MILLWORK: F.K. ANDERSON. CUSTOM FURNITURE: BBI. UPHOLSTERY LEATHER: EDELMAN. FABRICS: MAHARAM; HBF. OVITZ'S OFFICE DESK CHAIR: KEILHAUER. CONFERENCE CHAIRS: HERMAN MILLER. LIGHTING: BOYD. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: TASLIMI.



