

## FOZ DESIGN



Fauzia Khanani of architecture and design studio Foz Design stripped The Bloc's Financial District office down to its concrete flooring and steel infrastructure for a casual, not corporate, environment.



When health-wellness creative engagement agency The Bloc approached its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it opted to go beyond the standard supermarket cake and champagne. Instead, the company merged its two New York City offices into one new space in the Financial District and refreshed its entire brand identity. For their new office space, founding partners Susan Miller Viray and Rico Viray chose Fauzia Khanani of architecture and design studio Foz Design, who also created two residences for the Virays.

The Bloc opted for two floors in a downtown building that was formerly occupied by stock traders who left after Hurricane Sandy flooded it. Following the storm, the space was unoccupied for several years, making it easy for Khanani to decide to completely gut it and start fresh.

After working between two locations for seven years, it was important to The Bloc that the new 55,268-square-foot space felt cohesive and could easily accommodate the entire 200-person staff. To achieve that, Khanani focused on constructing an open, democratic environment that capitalized on the building's 360-degree views of New York and didn't contain any dead space. This involved clustering conference rooms, amenities, and private offices at the building's core, and then taking what Khanani calls a topographical approach throughout the space—manufacturing slight elevation changes both structurally and visually.

The lowest point is at the perimeter along the windows,

where employees are encouraged to work casually and have informal discussions. "Part of The Bloc's culture is to have a lot of meetings, so it was a priority for them to provide different types of meeting spaces, whether it's two people, a conference call, or a quarterly meeting," Khanani said.

To encourage this sentiment, Khanani designed a custom maple bench with a slatted, undulating form that not only reflects the East River's currents, but also conceals the radiators behind it. The bench doubles as stadium seating to accommodate company-wide meetings that were previously impossible in the old office configuration.

Moving to the next "level," custom steel and solid-wood workstations by Teknion draw the eye up without necessitating structural changes. To avoid unease in such close, open quarters, Khanani carefully placed workstations so that no one is juxtaposed eye to eye. To further the area's sense of privacy and calm, Khanani incorporated carpeting and weighty textiles like wool and cotton that act as an acoustic buffer in the largely glass-filled space.

From the workstations, ADA-compliant ramps wrap around tiny two- and three-person meeting rooms, then lead to larger conference rooms and private offices. The enclosed spaces are 24 inches higher than the rest of the floor and have glass walls to preserve views and allow light to permeate.

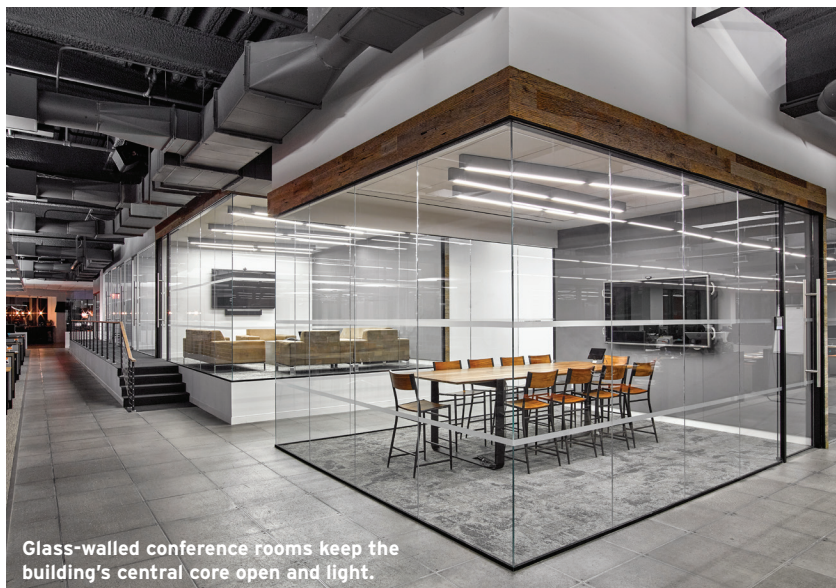
"The whole theme is a casual, industrial space; the idea was to not go back to what the Financial District was before," Khanani said. She balanced the more industrial aspects of the space with sculptural lighting and sleek furnishings from Teknion, Emeco, and Knoll. The color scheme for all of the materials and products Khanani selected is also the company's colors—orange, gray, and black—and prevents the space from feeling overly corporate, while enhancing brand identity.

The company moved in July 2015 with positive feedback. "I ran into a guy the other day in the elevator who asked if I was a new employee," said Khanani. "When I explained I was the architect, he thanked me because he had interviewed at The Bloc five years ago and decided it wasn't a good fit. Then, when he interviewed again this year he saw the new office and thought, 'I really want to work here now.' That was just the greatest compliment." OM

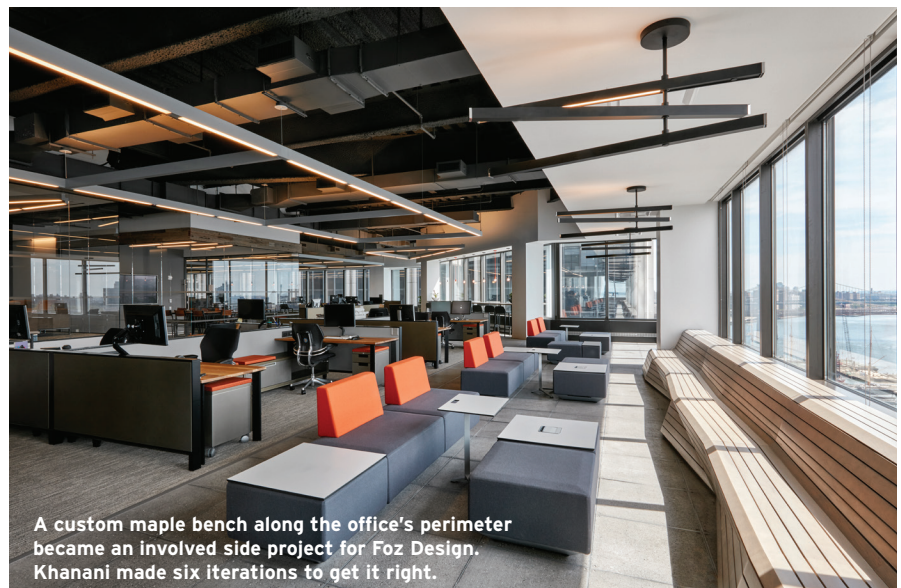
## RESOURCES:

**Architect of Record**  
The Mufson Partnership  
[mufsonpartnership.com](http://mufsonpartnership.com)  
**Contractor**  
Benchmark Builders  
[benchmark-ny.com](http://benchmark-ny.com)

**Furnishings**  
Teknion  
[teknion.com](http://teknion.com)  
**Pendant Lights**  
Picasso Lighting  
[picassoltg.com](http://picassoltg.com)



Glass-walled conference rooms keep the building's central core open and light.



A custom maple bench along the office's perimeter became an involved side project for Foz Design. Khanani made six iterations to get it right.