

# Business *in* the Front

O+A crafts an unexpectedly modern workplace for a finance company.

Olivia Martin

“Finance” usually conjures images of staid blue suits, brass plaques, and hallways lined with nondescript carpet. But when wealth-management firm Cambridge Associates moved from Menlo Park, California, to San Francisco, Amy Callahan, the firm’s managing director of operations, sought out San Francisco-based design studio O+A to “push the limits of a traditional workplace.”

O+A design studio director Mindi Weichman spearheaded the project, helping Cambridge Associates select a stripped-bare circular space with wide-sweeping views of San Francisco. “The footprint was definitely challenging,” she said. “At first, they thought they wanted private offices for all the principals and senior associates, with everyone else in an open space. But the initial planning for this showed that the perimeter would become very inefficient. We suggested workstations with large barriers so that there would be secluded zones and privacy, but no wasted space.”

## Right

Design studio O+A took advantage of the employees-only kitchen in the Cambridge Associates office to employ a playful design. The ceiling is “peeled back” to reveal the structure, while a Davis Furniture Modo sofa, Carl Hansen & Søn chairs, Andreu World barstools, and Michael Anastassiades lights create a comfortable, but still professional space.





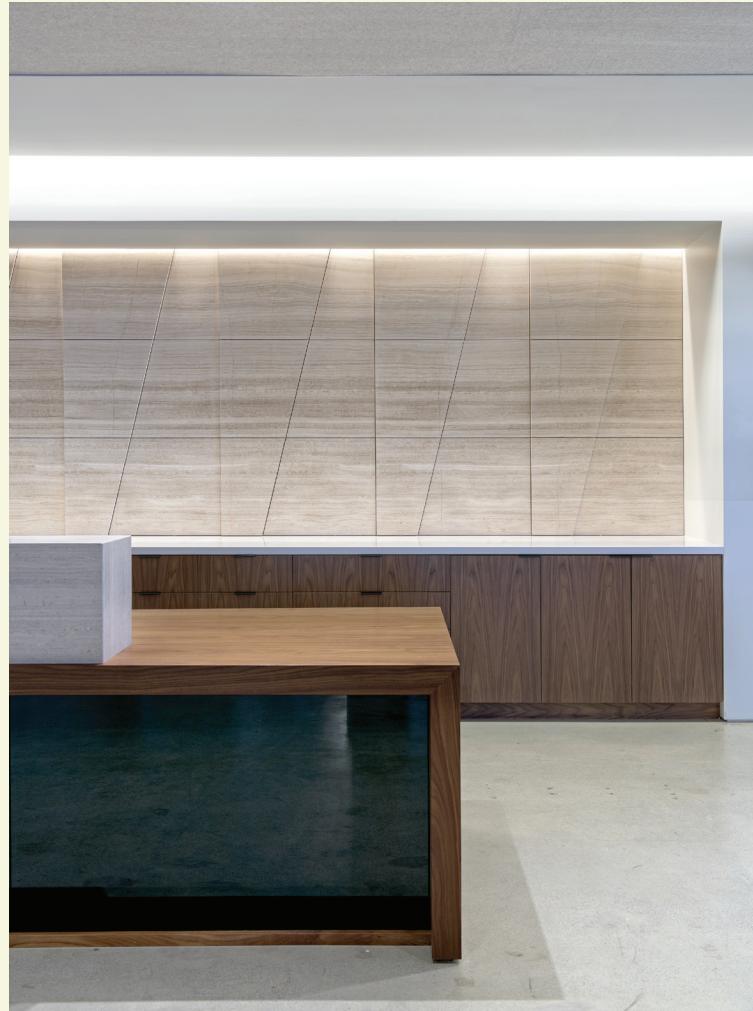
**Above**

*A massive horsehair lighting fixture by Apparatus anchors the lobby space, accompanied by a rug from Kasthall, Tuxedo sofa by Geiger, and a custom screen-printed privacy wall by O+A.*



### Right

*For the lobby, O+A custom-designed a geometric limestone wall with local fabricator De Anza Tile. Durable, classic materials such as limestone, walnut, glass, and steel convey a sense of stability and timelessness to clients*



Jasper Sanidad

From there, open desks custom designed by Knoll were provided for the rest of the employees, and other spaces were created for varying levels of privacy—from the self-explanatory conference and quiet rooms, to the library (communal, but not social) and then the kitchen area, which serves as a place to hang out and have informal gatherings.

This design strategy required toeing the line between traditional and modern office typologies. For example, keeping the concrete floors “took a bit of convincing,” Weichman said, but it created a harmonious interplay with more classic components. “[Cambridge Associates] wanted to tell a story of permanence and timelessness—and just as steel and glass serve as symbols for those values in architecture, they also



convey cost and quality in the professional world." Walnut was used extensively throughout, lending old-school warmth to the space, and a limestone wall in the reception area is polished, but not traditional.

While these client-facing areas remain conservative, with a neutral color palette of burgundy, navy, and olive, components such as a sculptural horsehair fixture by Apparatus and tessellated walnut walls in the conference rooms keep things interesting. Local art consultant Laura Grigsby contributed architectural, abstract paintings, and photographs for additional texture and color.

Employee-only areas are more playful. In the kitchen, the ceiling is peeled back to display the building's infrastructure—

#### Above

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*Weichman, but balances the walnut, brass, and glass elements throughout the office. A rug by ege carpets helps to keep the room from feeling cold.*





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### Left

*The core of the building is painted a striking blue that contrasts with the orange seats of the Carl Hansen & Søn chairs. Amuneal created the brass bookshelves and custom tables offer a place for employees to work and socialize.*

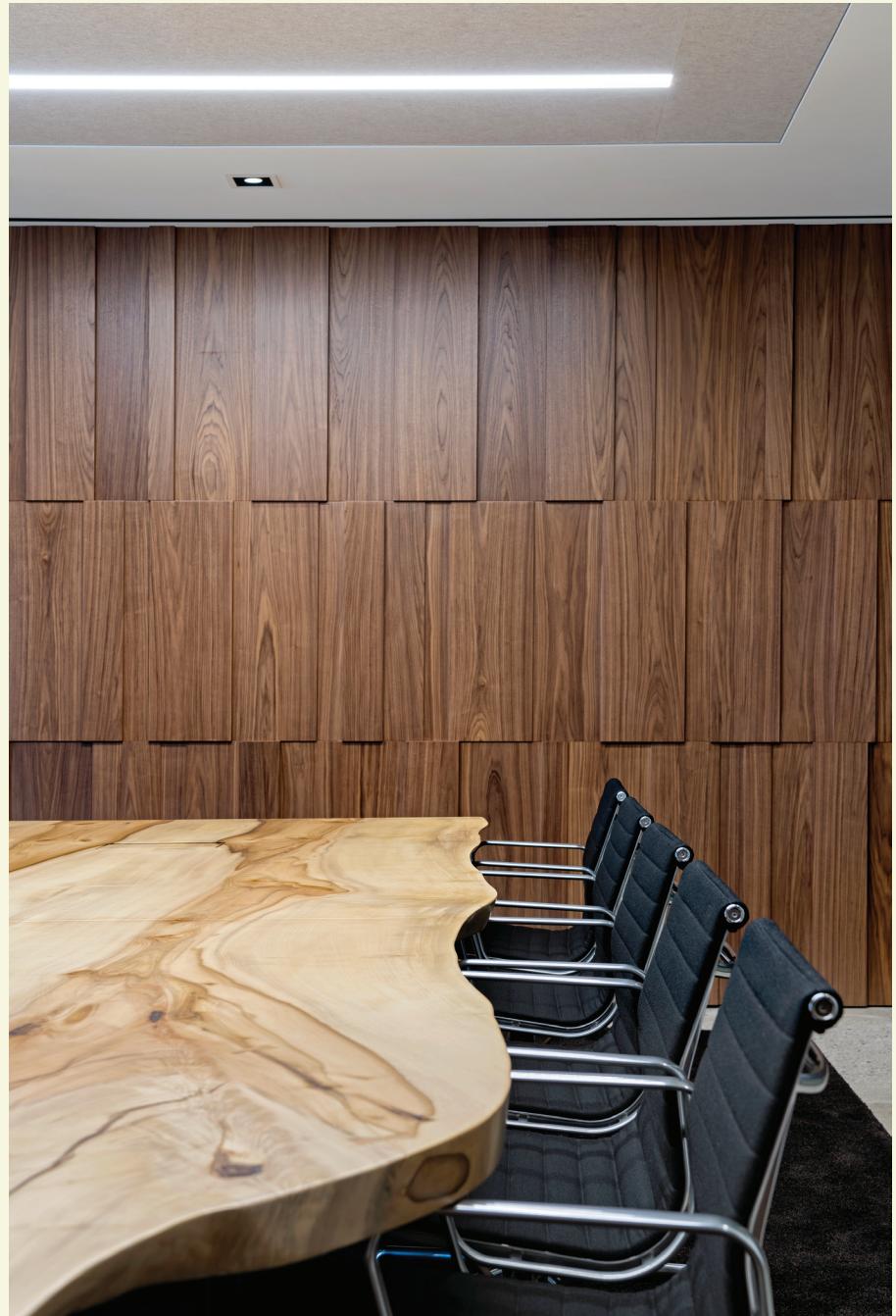
### Right

*Conference rooms and other client-facing areas skew more conservative with Knoll office furniture and tessellated walnut paneling O+A created with Plant Architectural Woodwork, but a custom raw wood table by Woodtech adds a twist.*

just a dash of industrial aesthetic. “They wanted to show that they have an edgy side, but in a more refined way,” said Weichman. “The design is relative to whatever is happening to the space—the kitchen is a casual, louder, and more entertaining space versus the conference room, where things are clean and more buttoned up.” In the hallway, a string of weighted pendulum lights by Roll & Hill also add levity. “They can be moved, but

I think the employees are scared to touch them,” laughed Weichman.

Ultimately, O+A presents a fresh approach to the now-ubiquitous open-office model replete with “standard start-up amenities.” Though there is a distinct lack of Ping-Pong tables and kegerators, the main pillars of the modern workplace—flexible seating, natural light, opportunities for socialization and relaxation—are thoughtfully well executed.



Jasper Sanidat