



change the channel

Rottet Studio reinvents Viacom in Los Angeles

text: *edie cohen*
photography: *eric laignel*

There's a new Hollywood in town. Not in terms of just content and distribution but physically as well. On Los Angeles's Hollywood and Sunset Boulevards, stretches that were once seedy are now media central, a key component being the mixed-use complex Columbia Square.

Its centerpiece is the former CBS building, now home to the NeueHouse Hollywood coworking space. The development also includes a residential tower, plus two new six-story office buildings. Which brings us to Viacom, the largest lessee.

The television behemoth's eight brands and 850 employees occupy one entire structure and half of its neighbor. The total comes to 211,000 square feet. Do those numbers make your head spin? Not *Interior Design* Hall of Fame member Lauren Rottet's. She knows plenty about high-profile entertainment enterprises, having completed headquarters for United Talent Agency and Paradigm. In fact, it was a tour of UTA that clinched the Viacom deal for Rottet Studio founding principal Richard Riveire and associate principal Patricia McCaul.

Coming on board during the construction phase facilitated some basic moves. Outside, Viacom was able to proclaim a big, bold presence via an amplified entry. It's capped by a cube of the very bluest of blue glass, protruding at an angle. (Inside, the cube hosts major client presentations.)



The big idea was "to make a destination workplace," McCaul begins. Unlike in New York, the L.A. headquarters displays little distinction between BET, VH1, MTV, Comedy Central, Paramount Network, and the rest. Commingling the channels sends the singular message: This is *Viacom*. In the words of Yetta Banks, vice president of the planning and design studio and a trained designer, "We're a global media company, a bunch of brands coming together, where everything would fit, and everyone could be creative." ➔

Previous spread: In reception at Viacom's Los Angeles headquarters by Rottet Studio, sofas by Alfred Kleene and Gabriele Assmann flank a cluster of tables by Vincenzo Maiolino.

Top: Near conference rooms, a lounge centers on a table by Marc Thorpe Design. **Bottom:** Laminated glass encloses the main presentation room.

Opposite top: From reception, a painted steel staircase rises past an MDF slat wall washed by LEDs. **Opposite bottom:** Neon signage in the ground level's elevator lobby is custom.





TV's constant flux mandated flexibility. So the planning concept, McCaul explains, was to provide "an architectural armature over which they could layer." Here's how organization works on the main workplace levels of four through six. First, they're connected to one another by stairs. Elevator lobbies, meanwhile, she compares to bus stops, featuring a system similar to billboards. "We gave them large galvanized metal frames, cleated to the wall, so printed panels could be changed out." Extending in both directions from the elevator lobbies, extra-wide corridors terminate at lounges hugging the curtain wall. "Each piece of lounge furniture is different by design," Banks continues—she helped select every single one. The vibe is quirky and somewhat hospitality-esque, decidedly not traditional office.

Coming from a quasi-siloed situation, Viacom now has mostly open office areas with sit-stand workstations arranged in pods. "It's a digital studio with exposed ceilings and cable trays," Riveire says. So as not to disturb the frankly gorgeous concrete ceilings and floors, power is delivered to the workstations via poles that double as supports for fabric screens. Thanks to break-out areas built into the mix, a collaborative spirit pervades.

Top: *Orchestral Cacophony* by Novo Arts overlooks a Timothy Oulton sofa and a Patricia Urquiola rocker in a lounge. **Center:** In an elevator lobby, MTV's logo appears on fabric stretched over a light box. **Bottom:** Changing arrays of framed posters face office areas with sit-stand workstations by Charles Rozier and Robert Reuter.

Opposite: Rubber tubing and a painted steel grid compose Novo Arts's *Digital Weaving*, installed in a lounge.

More than a workplace, Viacom is a showplace. "The environment enhances creative problem-solving, strengthens team culture, and enables our team to shape amazing stories," Banks continues. "Our charge to Rottet was to create a space to delight the spirit of every occupant, whether a visitor or a Viacom employee." Riveire and McCaul obliged with plenty of sass and kinetic energy. How about an Instagram moment on the way to the elevators? That would be the affectionately nicknamed Snarky Wall, where LED panels form changing messages behind the tinted glass expanse fronted by an audacious graffiti-splattered Victorian-style settee. Right across from the elevators, a neon sign blares, "Hello!" But even beforehand, in reception, an immense monitor displays changing visuals. Another wall in constant motion—its surface a kaleidoscope of multicolored LEDs and abstract graphics—backdrops the bronze-painted switch-back staircase rising to the blue glass cube.

Above that cube, much of the third level is dedicated to the staff café, in industry parlance "craft services." It's an all-day meal magnet cum lounge, thanks to a long meandering counter in white solid-surfacing, comfy seating, and of course a big-screen TV. Behind the counter stands a wall of glass panels laminated in rainbow colors: Limoncello, Kelp, Periwinkle, Lagoon, Orange Sorbet, and Lapis. The glass conceals a full catering kitchen, which allows the café to double as a bona fide events space, spilling onto a balcony.

While Viacom is a major corporation, its 150-strong art collection is like no corporate collection we've seen—created under the aegis of Novo Arts, a "post-Warholian art factory," as described by founder Marlaine Deppe, herself an artist and curator. "We took a renegade approach." Works including an assemblage of musical instruments, a fantastical freeway, with toy cars affixed to a photographic print, and a wall installation of Day-Glo rubber tubing, woven onto a steel grid, stopped us ➔



Top: In a corridor, Novo Arts affixed toy cars to a photographic print for Highways. **Bottom:** Eero Saarinen's side table stands beneath artwork by Viacom creatives in a break-out area.

Opposite top: LED panels form different messages behind tinted glass in the lobby. **Opposite bottom:** Stools by Erika Kövesdi line the café's 35-foot-long counter, composed of five ganged segments in solid-surfacing and brushed stainless steel.

in our tracks. Everywhere we turned, spunky murals were painted directly on the walls.

But let's not forget the performing arts. Viacom's ground level is a complete production lot, featuring a pair of shoot studios, 50 edit bays, two audio suites, and a green room. All that's missing is a screening room. But not for long. A 10-seat facility is set for imminent debut. ↘



PROJECT TEAM

MARK BORKOWSKI; CHRIS JONES; HOKULEA DUFFETT; BROOKE WALKER; MICHELLE MULLITZ; GINNY HIGHTOWER; JANE CHEN; HAROUT DEDEYAN; WINNIE WONG; THERESA LEE; ROTTET STUDIO. HOUSE & ROBERTSON ARCHITECTS: BUILDING ARCHITECT. SEAN O'CONNOR LIGHTING: LIGHTING CONSULTANT. DESIGN ONE; 513: CUSTOM LOBBY WALL INSTALLATION. McCANN SYSTEMS; SYSTEMS GROUP; VENEKLASEN ASSOCIATES: AUDIOVISUAL CONSULTANTS. SWA GROUP: LANDSCAPING CONSULTANT. ARGENTO GRAHAM CONSULTANTS; BRIGHTWORKS SUSTAINABILITY: SUSTAINABILITY CONSULTANTS. ENGLEKIRK STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS: STRUCTURAL ENGINEER. AMA: MEP. SEELEY BROTHERS: WOODWORK. HATHAWAY DINWIDDIE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY: CORE, SHELL CONTRACTOR. HOWARD BUILDING CORPORATION: GENERAL CONTRACTOR. JONES LANG LASALLE: PROJECT MANAGER.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT EGE: RUG (RECEPTION). ROCHE BOBOIS: SOFAS, TABLES, OTTOMAN. FLOS: CEILING STRIPS. HIGH FASHION HOME: HAND CHAIRS (LOUNGE). ANDREW GROSSMAN UPHOLSTERY: CUSTOM ARMCHAIRS (LOUNGE), CUSTOM COFFEE TABLE (CAFÉ). BERNHARDT DESIGN: TABLE (LOUNGE), STOOLS (CAFÉ). ARKTURA: CEILING PANELS (LOUNGE), CEILING FINS (CAFÉ). MITCHELL GOLD + BOB WILLIAMS: SIDE TABLE (LOUNGE), ROUND COFFEE TABLE (LOUNGE), WHITE CHAIR (CAFÉ). WALTERS & WOLF: CURTAIN WALL MULLIONS (EXTERIOR). VIRACON: GLASS. PETRACER'S CERAMICS: FLOOR TILE (ELEVATOR LOBBY). WEST COAST SIGNS: CUSTOM SIGNAGE. LUMENWORX: LINEAR FIXTURES (ELEVATOR, OFFICE AREA). WEST ELM: PENDANT FIXTURES (LOUNGE). TIMOTHY OULTON: SECTIONAL. BEND: TABLE. KARTELL: CHAIR. CB2: SIDE TABLE (LOUNGE), COFFEE TABLE (BREAK-OUT AREA). MANSOUR MODERN: RUGS (LOUNGES). STEELCASE: CHAIRS (OFFICE AREA). BENTLEY: CARPET TILE. ARMSTRONG: CEILING SYSTEM. KNOLL: WORKSTATIONS, CUSTOM POWER POLE (OFFICE AREA), SIDE TABLE (BREAK-OUT AREA). BRIGHT GROUP: PURPLE SOFA (LOUNGE). HUMANSCALE: MONITOR ARMS (OFFICE AREA). ROOM & BOARD: SOFA (BREAK-OUT AREA). HBF: CHAIR. 3M: GLASS (LOBBY). FORMDECOR: SOFA. GLASPRO: GLASS (CAFÉ). DESIGN MATERIALS: RUG. ANDREU WORLD: ROCKING CHAIR. GUS MODERN: SOFA. THROUGHOUT BROOKSIDE: PANELING. MANNINGTON COMMERCIAL: FLOORING. HD BUTTERCUP; SHERIDAN GROUP; SYSTEMS SOURCE: FURNITURE DEALERS. BENJAMIN MOORE & CO.; DUNN-EDWARDS CORPORATION: PAINT.

