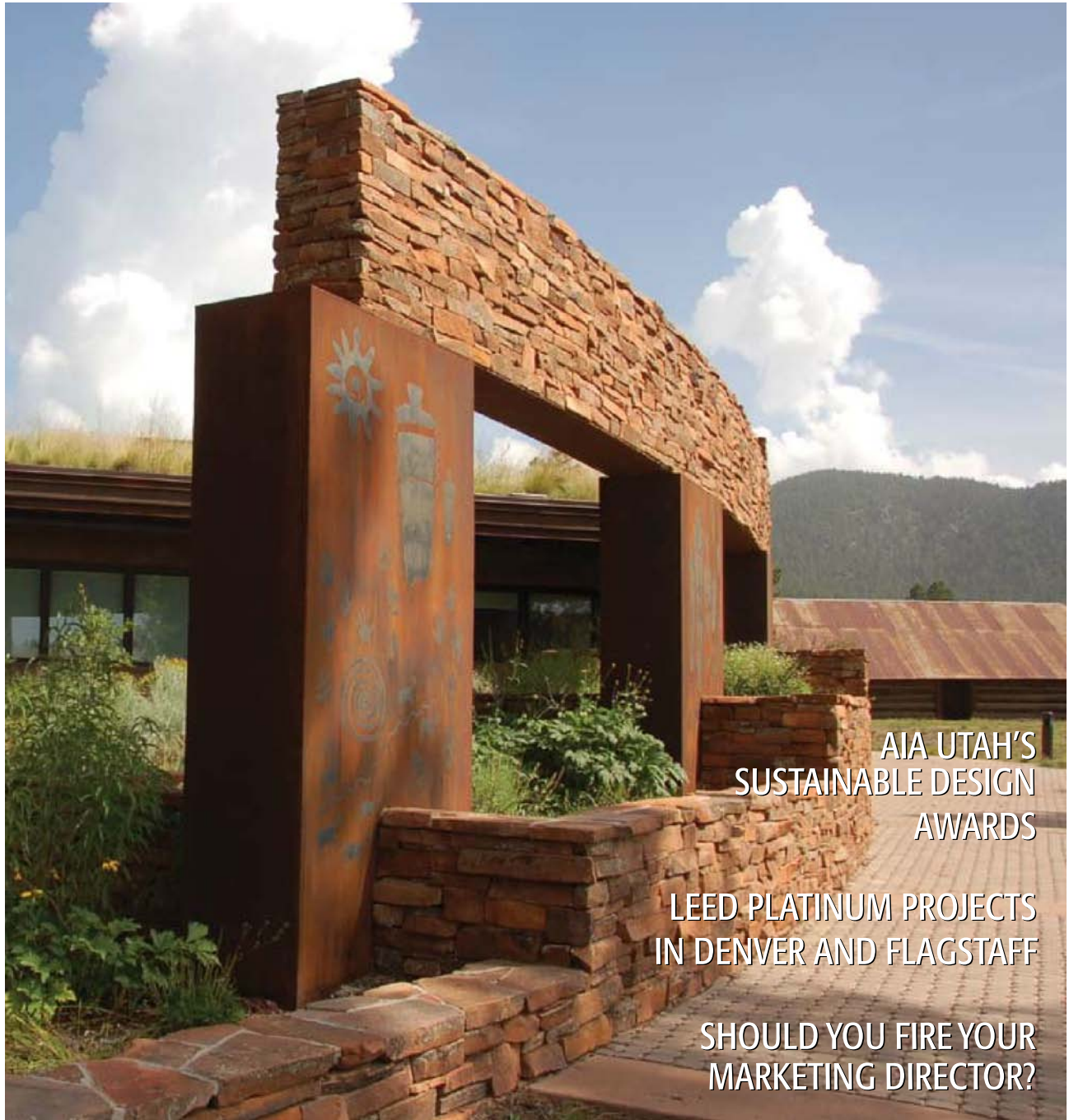


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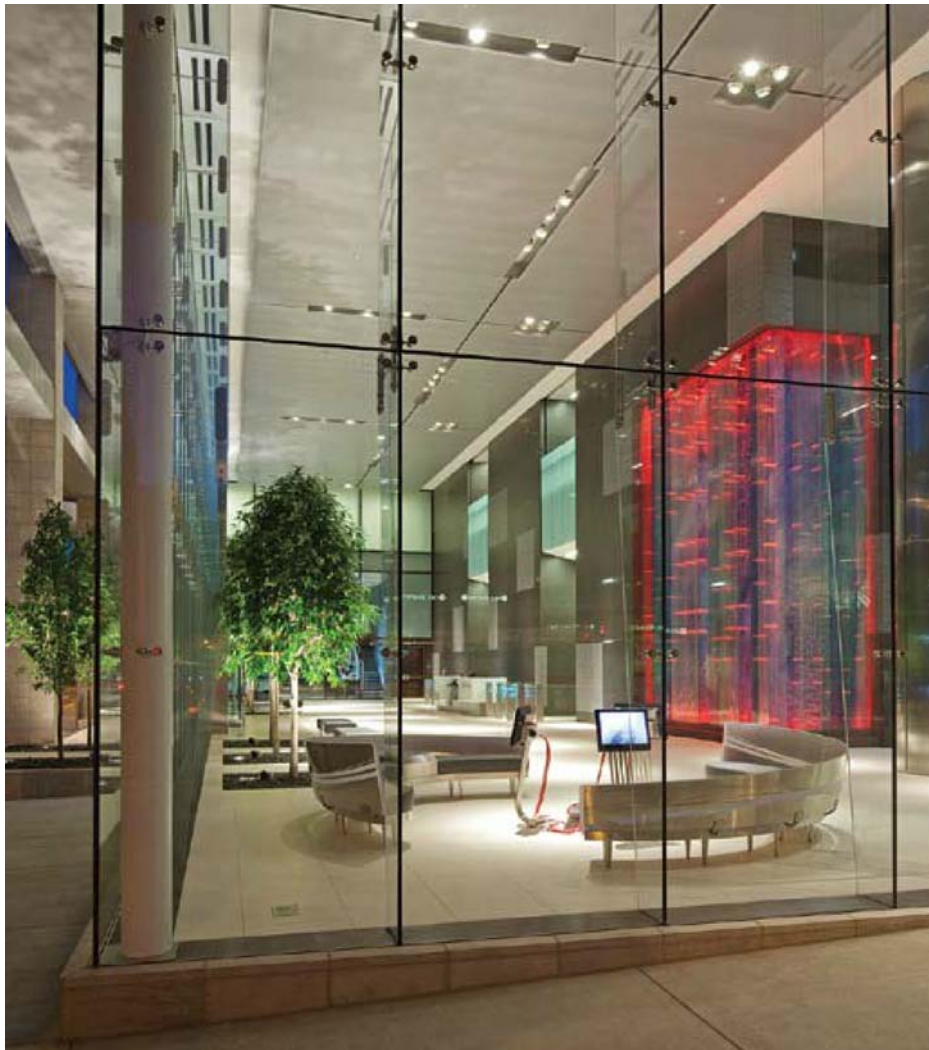
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LEED PLATINUM

Two Recent Projects Achieve The Ultimate Green Rating

BY NORA BURBA TRULSSON

*Exterior and lobby photography by Frank Ooms
Interior photography by Ron Pollard*

XCEL ENERGY REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS

At 1800 Larimer

Denver, Colorado

RNL

Denver, Colorado

W

HEN XCEL ENERGY LOOKED FOR A NEW REGIONAL HEADQUARTERS site in Denver where the firm could consolidate three previous locations, their corporate tag line, “responsible by nature,” figured prominently in the search. The Minneapolis-based utility company, which provides electric power and natural gas to eight Western and Midwestern states, desired a LEED Platinum building, in which they could create a LEED Platinum interior for the regional headquarters.

Xcel found space at 1800 Larimer, 22-story office tower in downtown Denver that was not only certified LEED-CS Platinum, but also offered full-height glass walls, 24,500-square-foot floor plates and tall ceilings. Completed last year, the highrise—the first to be built in the central business district in some 25 years—was



a spec office tower designed by the Denver office of RNL, an architecture, interiors and landscape architecture firm. The building, which includes parking for 413 cars, achieved Platinum status with features such as a roof garden, the use of recycled-content materials, reduced water usage, its proximity to public transportation and an under-floor air distribution system.

With a commitment of 14 floors in the new building, Xcel became the main tenant. But having RNL handle the utility company's interior design was not a sure thing. "We had to interview for the project," explains interior designer AnneMarie Dienstbach, an RNL principal. "It was not a done deal. The fact that we did the building was both a plus and a minus. Xcel wanted a tenant advocate, and we had to prove we could do the job."

RNL was awarded the project, and a team that included Dienstbach, interior designer Rene Stremel, IIDA, LEED AP; chairman and CEO (architecture) H. Joshua Gould, AIA, LEED AP; interior designers Sara McGarry, IIDA, LEED AP, Michelle Richter, LEED ID+C; and Patty Thwaites, LEED AP; interior and architectural designer Michael Slater, LEED AP BD+C; associate David Key, LEED AP; and architect Robert Beblavi, LEED AP; came together to work on the Xcel job.

The team paid a visit to the utility's Minneapolis headquarters. Initially, the plan was to take design cues from the Midwestern facility for the new space, which was slated to accommodate 1,300 employees. "We soon realized that we had a lot more design opportu-

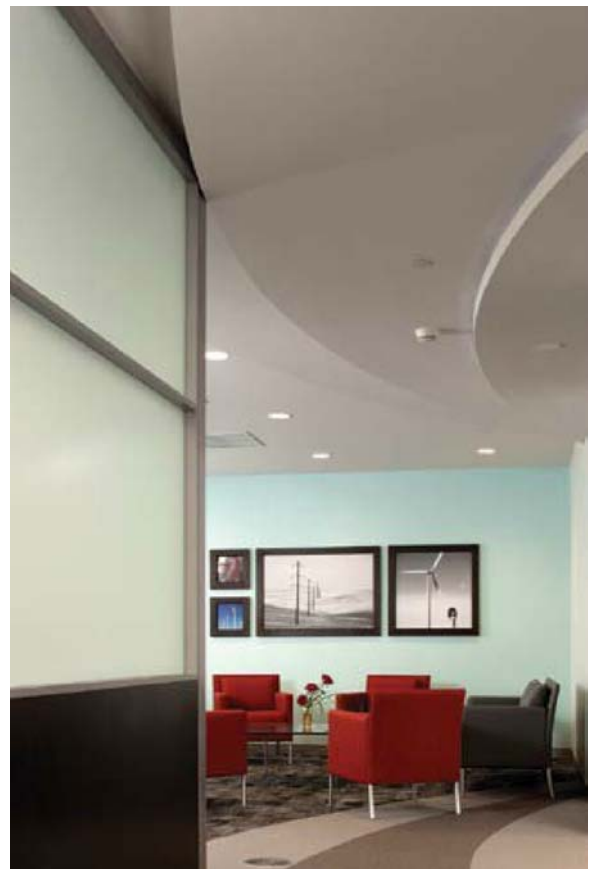
nity in Denver, given the building and the desire to achieve Platinum certification for the interior," explains Dienstbach.

"The Minneapolis offices had small windows," adds Rene Stremel. "The Denver building had so much glass. There was no common design thread. Also, Xcel was re-branding themselves with "responsible by nature," so that fed into the design.

Additionally, age played into the design of the Denver quarters. According to Dienstbach, some 50 percent of Xcel's employee base would be retiring within five years. That meant that Xcel would be replacing half of its Denver staff with new and, theoretically, younger workers. "The new space had to attract younger employees," explains Stremel. "That meant it had to be youthful and energetic, and emphasize collaboration and transparency."

With one floor dedicated to computers and training, and one designated as an executive level, the RNL team devised a floorplan for the remaining floors that placed workstations

Opposite page: The 1800 Larimer lobby includes a corner waiting area for Xcel Energy. Above: Glass-topped workstations, de-mountable glass walls and plenty of gathering spaces combine to create a light-filled, flexible office that encourages collaboration. Below: On the executive level, pops of red spark a cool color scheme.



at the perimeters of the floor, allowing those areas to have the majority of the views of downtown Denver's street scene and natural daylight. A small cluster of private offices and conference spaces occupy the ends of the floorplan, while the central core is made up of elevator banks, a small elevator "landing space," restrooms and storage. A break room and conference spaces flank the elevator banks.

"There really isn't an entry floor or reception areas on each floor," says Dienstbach. "Visitors check in on the ground floor, in the main lobby, and are escorted upstairs by an employee."



Left: A curved ceiling detail adds interest to the executive level. Above: In a break room, a curved bar top encourages coffee talk away from the kitchen portion of the space.



The interior design for Xcel begins on the ground-floor lobby of the highrise, where visitors can learn about Xcel on a cluster of flat-screen display panels, surrounded by circular seating. The main reception desk is split into two entities, one serving Xcel, and one serving the rest of the building.

Up the elevators, every other floor is color-coded a soothing, pale shade of green or blue, highlighted by pops of red and yellow. "We wanted a fresh, crisp palette with high contrast," says Stremel. "It brings a level of energy and vibrancy to the workspace."

Curved countertops in the break rooms and reception counters near the elevators add contrast to the rectangular forms of the glass-topped workstations, as do curved ceiling details. Demountable glass walls and workstations that can easily be reconfigured were installed to ensure flexibility.

More than 40 percent of the furnishings were re-used from Xcel's previous locations. New pieces include molded maple barstools, bright yellow side chairs and coffee tables grouped together in collaborative "huddle" spots. Each workstation



Above: A tree-filled plaza links the 1800 Larimer lobby to the street. Left: Flat-screen displays tell the story of Xcel in the building's ground-floor lobby.

also includes a cushion-topped file cabinet, which can be pulled out for additional seating. Contemporary pendant lighting, patterned carpet tile flooring and framed graphics that depict everything from utility poles and windmills to wind turbines finish off each floor.

Completed last year, the project is registered as pursuing LEED-CI Platinum certification through the use of such strategies as daylighting and occupancy sensors, user-controlled HVAC, low water-use plumbing fixtures and recycled content in numerous materials ranging from carpeting and countertops to glass tile and gypsum board.

The sustainable design, summarizes Stremel, is meant to appeal to a more youthful worker. "The younger generation likes to engage, move around and collaborate. They're less hierarchical."

Architecture and interior design: RNL, 1050 17th St, Suite A200, Denver, CO 80265; (303) 295-1717 or www.rnldesign.com.

Workstations: Steelcase, www.steelcase.com.

Demountable walls: KI, www.ki.com.

Carpeting: C&A Floorcoverings/Tandus, www.tandus.com.

Bar stools: Stylex, www.stylex.com.

Side chairs: Coalesse, www.coalesse.com.