



Harvard University Center for Design Informatics



When the staff at the Center for Design Informatics, one of six research centers at Harvard Graduate School of Design, were told they needed to relocate to a new facility, they looked at it as an opportunity to pursue a fresh approach to their space. Since the CDI researches new approaches to work, its physical space should support the Center's approach to work: in this case, collaboration.

**EDUCATION/LIBRARY;
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS**

Topic:

*Collaboration
Environments*

Application:

*Collaboration/Team
Informal Learning*

Project Scope:

40 employees; 1,000 square feet

Herman Miller Product:

*Resolve® System
Aeron® Chairs
Caper® Chairs
Eames® Aluminum Group Chairs*

Year Completed:

2004



The Center for Design Informatics (CDI) is one of six research centers of the Harvard Graduate School of Design. The CDI's focus is on information technology and its impact on the built environment, building industry processes, and the applications of new technologies in education, such as distance learning and e-teaching. CDI has a staff of 40, including graduate student researchers.

When CDI staffers were told they needed to relocate due to demolition of their existing facility, they looked at the move as an opportunity to pursue an innovative and fresh approach to their space. The CDI was housed in a lab space of less than 800 square feet, with few windows, dark décor, and used furniture—hardly the kind of environment that would nurture creativity and encourage collaboration. Adjacent staff offices were about 80 square feet each and occupied by two or three staff members. One of the offices was frequently used as meeting space.

The CDI team took an active and collaborative role in researching and designing the new space. They partnered with Harvard's real estate and facility group, with an A&D firm, and with Herman Miller's Creative Office group.

They wanted the space to reflect the culture and type of work done within it. If emerging technologies, which the CDI researches, support new approaches to how work gets done, then the physical space in which the CDI team works should support them as well. The team envisioned an innovative and flexible workplace that encouraged and enhanced creative and collaborative work.

How would they realize this vision? The team arrived at four central points for the design of their work space—it needed to be:

1. Flexible
2. Able to support collaboration and avoid hierarchical design
3. Open and transparent
4. Able to support flexible and adaptable technology

To achieve all of these objectives, the team settled on a combination of Herman Miller products and a raised floor solution for power and data. The Resolve system, with its canopies and screens, allows workers to close off their work space when they need privacy and concentration. But the adaptability of Resolve also allows for an open floor plan, without panels or walls dividing space and people. The Resolve layout created a central path through the Center; small workspaces were delineated by Resolve system and Herman Miller mobile tables to provide areas for team research. A raised floor system allowed the entire space to remain open. Technology was integrated throughout the space in a seamless and fluid way, as the team had envisioned.

Within the Center there are also three smaller glass-enclosed spaces: a technology booth filled with equipment accessed throughout the CDI workspace and the conference room; a small conference room; and two 'phone booths,' quiet rooms that provide acoustic privacy when solitary, heads-down work is required.

A final note: Design and planning were completed in four months—lightning speed for a facility design project. But the ability of the team to address their needs and wishes and then realize them in a highly innovative, interactive, and adaptable space speaks to the power of collaboration in bringing minds and ideas together to accomplish great things. The CDI will continue to nurture such collaboration.

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