

The Business of Furniture | April 10, 2019

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KEM STUDIO and MASHstudios Debut New Furniture for Focus



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HIGHLIGHTS

08 UPFRONT: Knoll Ready With its Own Not NeoCon

The new Chicago showroom will host “Knoll Design Days,” June 10 -12, the same time, but not the same place as NeoCon.

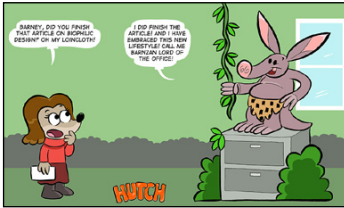
12 Bene Achieved Major Growth in Sales and Earnings in 2018

In a very competitive global environment, the Bene Group prevailed in the past financial year in numerous international deals and could increase its sales to 151.4 million euros.

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This year 2020 has deployed the 2020 Content Downloader, a solution that allows customers to acquire all available manufacturers in a single download.

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The company in 2018 also added nearly 20 people to the sales department, including new vice presidents, territory managers and sales team members who work across North America.



17 | INDEAL Launches Expansive Training Program: INDEAL U

The spark for INDEAL U came a couple years ago when founders Dave Gatherum and Dave Bloch started to have a dialog with dealers in the network.



20 | Configura Chairman Sune Rydqvist Leaves Behind Legacy of Innovation

As co-founder and co-owner of Configura, Rydqvist had many different roles, but the company's development, culture and growth were always at the center.



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The Business of Furniture



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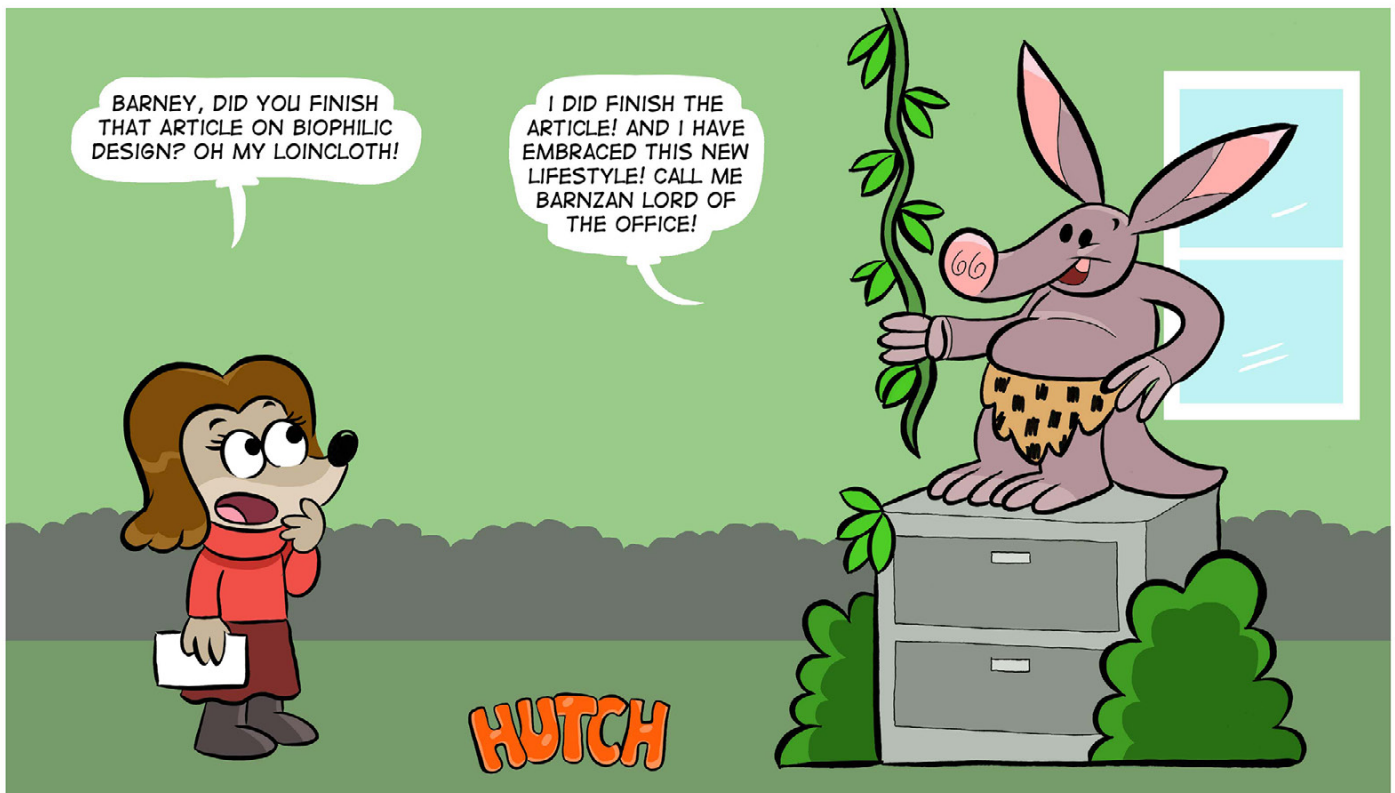
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ROB KIRKBRIDE, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



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DESIGNERS AND MAKERS

KEM STUDIO and MASHstudios Debut New Furniture for Focus

WHEN THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF EMPLOYEES MILLING ABOUT IN AN OPEN OFFICE EVERY DAY, INDIVIDUALS FACE COUNTLESS THREATS TO THEIR FOCUS IF THEY LOOK UP OR AROUND.

BY EMILY CLINGMAN

What is it that really distracts people at work in an open environment? Is it the noise? The awkward close proximity to coworkers? The lack of privacy?

Well, yes. But there's one subtle distraction more powerful than any other, and it can potentially derail one's concentration thousands of times a day: eye contact.

Catching another's glance comes with an expectation, which requires an action, even if it's just a nod or a smile. When there are hundreds of employees milling about in an open office every day, individuals face countless threats to their focus if they look up or look around.

This discovery came about after the architecture and industrial design firm KEM STUDIO of Kansas City, Missouri, responded to a brief by Herman Miller seeking new product ideas for solo, concentrated work within an open environment.

Co-founder of KEM STUDIO, Jonathon Kemnitzer, along with his team, conducted research by touring corporate environments around the country. They found there was a direct connection with certain lines of sight and distraction.

"First, we noticed the endless sea of desks, like a suburb, all the same, sort of void of humanity or meaningful purpose," Kemnitzer said. "What we also found is that we saw things different from what was being said. Team leaders would talk about the tools in place to help teams collaborate better. But when we asked the staff about their tools, they were kind of at a loss, or discouraged by limited options of just the open office and maybe a side conference room."

The pretty black and white statement was alarming to Kemnitzer.

"If you are at your desk, and you need to collaborate, you shouldn't have to go into a conference room to collaborate," he said. "There are moments for that of course, but if collaboration isn't happening in the space for which collaboration is intended, then, what's the issue?"

Digging deeper into this issue, the KEM STUDIO team noticed human interaction protocols come to the forefront. It's hard to collaborate or concentrate in an open office because there's this unspoken obligation to acknowledge people all the time. When the interactions are added up, they can cause hours of frustration and productivity loss for employees.



Aperture at Adobe





Aperture at Adobe

For instance, when you're walking on the sidewalk one way and another person is approaching from the opposite direction, typically, if you make eye contact with the other person you will say hello or at least nod. Humans also often feel obligated to make eye contact, because it's just rude to walk by someone so close and not be friendly — or so the protocol goes.

If we're willing to do that as strangers, imagine how much more powerful it is when someone you do know is walking by two feet away from your desk. It's almost impossible not to look up, or interact in small talk like “How was your weekend?” or “Did your pick win last night?” These interactions are always triggered by the eyes.

But, if you're walking on the sidewalk in one direction, and another person is walking on the sidewalk across the street, neither of you would feel obligated to holler hello at each other from that distance. You may not even notice each other, let alone make any eye contact. The same could be said for office mates across the room. It's only within a certain proximity — where two people can reach out and touch each other, basically — that this connection, this courtesy, is enacted.

KEM STUDIO concluded the line of sight needed to be broken. If you



Aperture at Adobe

can't see someone else's eyes, they can't see yours, which eliminates the feeling of obligation to connect.

Enter Aperture, a new take on the contemporary office desk to address distracting eye contact. Designed by KEM STUDIO, Aperture is a hood (or a canopy) for the work desk.

"It's different," Kemnitzer said. "But we designed it to be intuitive. When you see it, you're supposed to know exactly what to do with it."

Everything with the canopy was very intentional, he explained. The angle on top prevents the sightlines from both the standing and sitting positions. The angle at the side also allows users to hold a video chat within the space.

Aperture is about 68 inches wide, which is the average human wingspan, and 68 inches tall. The opening resembles blinders on a horse.

"With aperture, you can see through the side walls and the front is open, so you're still aware of your surroundings, but you also feel like you have some privacy, and you know you're not alone," Kemnitzer said.

The design was inspired by the St. Louis Arch.

"As you're standing under the arch, there's a line that sort of goes over and above you and down," Kemnitzer noted. "You have a very specific sense

of place when you're under there. It has a nice moment of a built environment, without being a built environment at all."

Aperture is the name of the desk and the name of a line, which includes accessory furnishings — high- and low-pose desks and a bench and a biophilic planter which distributes power and tech to the space.

"When we talk about starting with the individual and moving on to the group, those pieces allow individuals to curate their space around them," Kemnitzer said. "During our research, we saw people using tape to block off the opening of their cubicle or their space and putting up leave-me-alone signs."

“WE REALLY TRY TO BE ON THE LEADING EDGE WHEN IT COMES TO FURNISHING ADOBE SPACES — WITH TECHNOLOGY, MATERIALS, SUSTAINABILITY AND LOCAL WHENEVER POSSIBLE.”

With Aperture, individuals can nonverbally send the message they are in a zone and want to be left alone. Or, the pieces can be moved around to indicate they are open for conversations.

"If you want to stand or sit, close off or be open, the idea is that the individual can curate their own experience within a bigger, and open, environment," Kemnitzer said. "Like a neighborhood, we need to design offices and furnishings to include all the tools and spaces people need to do their best work and feel comfortable doing it."

KEM STUDIO presented the Aperture prototype to Herman Miller, which then presented it to some companies for feedback, Adobe being one of them. It turned out Herman Miller, though very receptive to it, could not proceed with manufacturing Aperture to scale at the time, but Adobe really wanted the line in its offices. So, long story and legal matters short, Miller agreed to and encouraged KEM STUDIO to move forward with a small run for Adobe. At this point, MASHstudios, a custom design and build firm in Los Angeles, was brought in to manufacture it for Adobe and license it for a broader market in the future.

"Even before we officially got involved in the project, just the names



obviously intrigued us,” said Devin Connolly, production design director at MASHstudios. “A client like Adobe — a multinational technology company, and the way that they work and how their culture aligns so well with MASHstudios — it’s sort of a dream client.

“After we understood what was being asked of us, we realized nothing else quite like this existed on the market. The screen and angle at which everything intersects is meant to mimic the aperture of a lens and to create a mix of obstructed and unobstructed light and vision. KEM STUDIO is a great company, and this is a cool product.”

Nicholas Ruiz, Adobe global workplace design manager, said Aperture solved many issues Adobe was trying to resolve in its offices around the globe: refuge, distraction, side blinds, plants, power and ergonomics ... all bundled together in Aperture. “We (Adobe) wanted this badly,” he said.

Ruiz said Aperture offers a feeling of comfort, “a feeling like you have a place. And, the eyes are less in the field and more on the task at hand.”

Currently, there are about 30 Aperture desks in a third space at Adobe’s new San Jose office. At this location, there are 1,200 employees so, admittedly, Ruiz said it’s a little hard to quantify the effectiveness of Aperture as the desks have only been in the office since January, and they only make up about 5 percent of Adobe’s furnishings in this space. But the ad hoc feedback has been “just great,” he said. There are plans to manufacture and install them in the main work areas — the neighborhoods — over time.

“We really try to be on the leading edge when it comes to furnishing Adobe spaces — with technology, materials, sustainability and local whenever possible,” Ruiz said. “We want to provide the best experience possible for our employees, to do the best work of their career. That takes exploration, it takes research and partnering with really great people like KEM STUDIO.” **BoF**