



Ramping It Up

Red Bull's Los Angeles headquarters by HLW is definitely ready for action

BY EDIE COHEN

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Serious about all-night partying, a kick-ass workout, or beating that late-afternoon slump? Those in the know down a fizzy chartreuse potion in a slim cobalt-and-silver can. Red Bull is all about energy—a message that's a natural tie-in with promotions for Formula 1 and NASCAR. For two-wheel enthusiasts, there's motocross. The fiercest daredevils of all enroll in the Red Bull Air Race at venues throughout North America and Europe.

Back on solid ground, HLW signed on to amp up the company's headquarters in Los Angeles. That meant relocating operations to an empty redbrick warehouse, a 100,000-square-foot Santa Monica building ideal for transformation into a corporate playground derived from a sports vocabulary.

The task of capturing Red Bull's indie spirit began outdoors. There's no signage, but a 4,500-square-foot events plaza assures visitors they're in the right place. To obtain a chunk of space that size—big enough to display a sponsored race car or four—team HLW demolished part of the center of the building, leaving wings on either side. Straight ahead, the new front elevation consists entirely of a colossal glass bi-fold door similar to the ones found in airplane hangars; it's raised and lowered by electric motors that drive nine drums wrapped with heavy-duty nylon belts.

To get the sports analogy right, HLW covered the plaza's paving of plastic-wood timbers with sheets of a paper-resin composite used for ramps at skate parks. Then the firm built its own ramp. It starts inside the hangar door and proceeds to swoop up and down for almost all of the interior's 500-foot length. Likewise surfaced in paper-resin composite, the plywood-and-steel structure appears authentic enough to tempt staffers to give it a try. To dissuade them, HLW cut holes in random spots and anchored sections of the ramp in beds of river rock.

Tucked beneath one of the ramp's 15-foot-high arcs is the magnet of every youth-oriented workplace, the café. This one revolves around two sunken conversation pits with vinyl-covered benches and concrete-block tables, not to mention an endless supply of the company's stock in trade. Other arcs in the ramp shelter small glass-fronted conference rooms. Straddling the ramp along its length, four white-painted steel braces look vaguely Alexander Calder-esque. In L.A., no one discounts earthquakes, and the braces represent one of the program's seismic upgrades.

The ramp flattens out at the back of the building for just long enough to pass through a 17-foot-high by 40-foot-wide aperture and continue as the floor of a 125-seat theater—before curving up and back for one final flourish, as the theater's canopy. For screenings, gray-painted acoustical panels fold down from a ceiling pocket above the huge opening, closing off the theater from the rest of the office.

To allow Red Bull executives to savor a bird's-eye view of their domain, HLW built a 3,900-square-foot mezzanine with a glassed-in boardroom as well as a few offices and workstations. However, most of the 75 private offices ring the perimeter of the ground level. All have terrific light, due to the building's 143 skylights.

Clustered around the central ramp are 75 custom workstations. "Red Bull felt that standard alternatives were a bit more 'corporate' than what they'd be comfortable with," principal Chari Jalali explains. HLW's simple version combines acoustical panels—dead ringers for charcoal-gray styrofoam—with hot-rolled steel frames and glass caps that allow visibility between seated employees. Work surfaces are plain white plastic laminate.

Although Red Bull opted out of a LEED rating, the headquarters is energy-efficient both inherently and by design. During the day, auxiliary lighting is rarely needed. To minimize solar heat gain, HLW double-glazed the skylights and windows. Roof insulation, concealed behind a ceiling system of stretched white muslin, was upgraded to an R-30 factor. The hangar door folds up to take advantage of Southern California's gentle climate. When needed, air-conditioning units feature multiple compressors for staged cooling.

Pushing the design process to new extremes with Red Bull, HLW went far beyond the customary walk-throughs with engineers and contractors. Not only did observation periods involve seven-day brainstorming sessions in the raw building shell, but the designers also spent a weekend in the desert. "Because of Red Bull's fascination with flight, we visited Tucson's airplane graveyard to explore using abandoned planes," Jalali says. "That didn't pan out, but the trip did broaden our thinking."

The project took a mere 20 months to complete—a feat made possible by a 24-7 design and production schedule, courtesy of HLW's office in Shanghai. No doubt, there was plenty of Red Bull on hand.

Previous spread: The ramp that defines the HLW-designed Los Angeles headquarters of Red Bull is surfaced in a paper-resin composite used for ramps at skate parks. Set below the undulating structure, the staff café is furnished with Jonathan Harvey's tables and chairs in brushed, anodized aluminum.

Top: Private offices feature glass inserts. Bottom: Set amid the café's nylon carpet tiles, vinyl-upholstered benches ring concrete-block tables to form conversation pits.

Top left: Eight conference rooms, 12 by 16 feet apiece, are inserted beneath the ramp. Top right: Painted steel seismic braces straddle the ramp. Skylights directly above it are clear; the rest are translucent.

Previous spread: Custom workstations' panels are a porous material made of expanded polypropylene beads; it's often used for car bumpers. The pendant fixtures have compact fluorescent lamps.

Top left: The ramp passes through a 17-by-40-foot opening to terminate at the theater. When screenings take place, gray-painted acoustical panels fold down from a ceiling pocket to serve as a projection surface. Top right: River rocks anchor part of the ramp.

Opposite top: Teflon-finished polyester mesh covers the theater's 125 seats. Opposite bottom: The custom hangar-style bi-fold door was constructed of glass and steel.

PROJECT MANAGER: BECKY TANOUYE. PROJECT ARCHITECT: DAVID SWARTZ. PROJECT TEAM: JOEL BLANK; SHIVA MANDELL; YI SHEN; STELLA YU. TABLES, CHAIRS (CAFÉ): ALLERUIR. DIFFUSERS (OFFICES): SEIHO INTERNATIONAL. TABLE (CONFERENCE ROOM): NIENKMPER. CHAIRS (CONFERENCE ROOM, OFFICE AREA): HERMAN MILLER. BENCHES (CAFÉ), FILE CABINETS (OFFICE AREA), WALL PANEL FABRIC (THEATER): KNOLL. CUSTOM WORKSTATIONS (OFFICE AREA): TANGRAM STUDIO. WORKSTATION PANEL MATERIAL: ACOUSTICAL SURFACES. TASK LIGHTS: ARTEMIDE. SEATS (THEATER): SEATING CONCEPTS; MAHARAM (FABRIC.) WALL PANELS: NOVAWALL SYSTEMS. CUSTOM DOOR (EXTERIOR): SCHWEISS BI-FOLD DOORS. CUSTOM WINDOW GLASS: PULP STUDIO. PENDANT FIXTURES: LUTREX L.C.I. RAMP SURFACING: RANIER RICHLITE COMPANY. CARPET TILE: SHAW. CEILING SYSTEM: MODERN INTERIORS. PAINT: DUNN-EDWARDS CORPORATION. MILLWORK: SEELEY BROTHERS. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: HORTON LEES BROGDEN LIGHTING DESIGN. LANDSCAPING CONSULTANT: LYNN CAPOUYA LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS. ENGINEERS: STRUCTURAL FOCUS (STRUCTURAL); SYSKA HENNESSY GROUP (MEP); KPFF (CIVIL). PROJECT MANAGER: CRESA PARTNERS. GENERAL CONTRACTOR: INNER SPACE CONSTRUCTORS.