

# CHICAGO LAWYER®

SPACES



## Going Low

### Gould & Ratner moves down for light, space and collaboration

BY DUSTIN J. SEIBERT

There was never any serious discussion about Gould & Ratner moving out of 222 N. LaSalle St., a place the firm has been since 1985. There's simply no denying the convenience of being in the same building with several of the firm's most prominent clients — most notably the Crown family, whose office is also in the building.

The firm moved from the eighth floor down to the third floor on Feb. 11. Reasons for the move were numerous, but the desire to downsize factored in prominently. Fortunately, the atrium that cuts through the middle of the building's first few floors helped with that.

"We liked having a full floor but we didn't necessarily need it," said partner Joseph Marzo. "There are pretty big floor plates in this building — about 45,000 square feet. The atrium helped us shave off about 6,000 square feet. Plus, because of the atrium and our proximity to the river, I think people prefer being lower than going up higher."

#### 'A CLEAN SLATE'

Perhaps the biggest catalyst for the move was a need for change after more than three decades.

"[The former space] was comfortable and we liked it, but it's not built out the way people would do it if they had a clean slate today," he said. "We knew we had to move into something new. It just wasn't clear whether we were

going to try and do it in that space, blow it out and start again or move to a new floor."

The firm took over in the space previously occupied by Hinshaw & Culbertson.

The leadership spent the better part of a year devising plans for the move. Construction itself took about five months.

Finally, the transition took place over one weekend with everything ready to go Monday morning.

Taking advantage of the views of Wacker Drive and the Chicago River's





north bank was an important facet for visiting clients, said Marzo. To benefit the staff, they made a sometimes unlikely decision to pull attorney offices away from the perimeter windows. The light now cuts through attorneys' offices and to the workspaces of support staff in a way that the previous space didn't allow.

"There are a lot of people who've worked here for 20 or 30 years and they haven't been able to see outside. So that's been remedied by the new design," Marzo said.

Despite being smaller in square footage, the new space supports growth, thanks in large part to uniform office sizes. About 15 percent of the space remains unoccupied.

#### FOSTERING OPENNESS

As with many firms, Gould & Ratner also has a focus on collaboration.

Conference room walls retract and fold to allow for more space than the previous conference rooms, which didn't fit the staff of 100 as comfortably. Also, the café is situated near the middle of the firm's office space and serves as a connecting point.

"Everyone tends to wander through there; it's a crossover space as well as a nice gathering place for lunch," Marzo said.

The café includes coffee and beer dispensers to help foster that collaborative culture.

"We built the space to foster that openness — bringing more light in, focusing on places people can work together," Marzo said. "That's generally our culture and that's why we moved from the old space ... while there wasn't anything wrong with it, it was built for 'Come in to your giant office and close the door.' "

Back in February, it was only two weeks since the move, so everyone was still getting used to the new digs.

"The non-attorney staff are thrilled; they're much happier with the additional light and space," Marzo said. "The attorneys are still a bit like, 'alright, let's see.' But generally, I think people are receiving it positively." CL

**djohnseib@hotmail.com**

Photography: Rena Naltsas

